Ancient Temples of Tamilnadu

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PREFACE

From very ancient times Tamilnadu has been called the Divine Tamil land. Ever since the pre-historic times many great leaders have emphasised the fact how religion is indispensable and essential for life. Among those religions (creeds) Saivism and Vaishnavism are the oldest and important ones particularly to Tamilnadu. These two and others connected with them have been named as 'Hindu Religion', by people who came later. Even today we see how the Hindus living all over India, have varied systems and principles. Yet, they have never failed to worship and revere Siva and Vishnu.

Even before 2000 years Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished in Tamilandu. In the middle period Buddhism and Jainism came from the North. Once people feared that Buddhism and Jainism might rule and even destroy Saivism and Vaishnavism. Buddhism flourished first and later Jainism. Many Kings of Tamilnadu embraced Jainism and fostered it. But in the beginning of seventh century many great Saiva and Vaishnava saints appeared and did many wonders. They wandered, singing devine hymns, from place to place and thereby reinstated Saivism and Vaishnavism by putting an end to Buddhism and Jainism. Ever since that day these two religions have been greatly cherished by the people of Tamilnadu. Though there are people who had embraced other religions that came later, e.g. Islam and Christianity, they are very small in number. Moreover many of them still worship the deities of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Many great Saiva saints who lived in the seventh century toured many places and sang the glories of Siva temple in those places and thereby impressed the Saiva faith in the minds of the people. Many who came later also toured many places and sang various hymns. Such holy places glorified by their hymns are considered to be important and sacred. In the same way, the places praised by Vaishnava Saints have become important and sacred. Such sacred places are 1008 in Saivism and 108 in Vaishnavism. Of the 1008 Saiva centres, today we have only less number of centres as places where Thevaram has been sung. A good many of them are situated in Tanjore District. Many great Chola Kings of that time and the contemporary Pandya Kings and the later Vijayanagara Kings built these temples, we see around us, and fostered Saivism. These temples became centres to foster faith, society, art, civilisation and culture. Many who tour the country know very well that the life of the people has become almost dependent on the temples.

Many kings of the middle ages and others have donated lands and other properties to the temples in Tamilnadu. Hence religion flourished well. Many temples even today possess lot of wealth and get income. Most of them are under the direct Supervision of the State Government. By directing the income of the temples for the benefit of the people, the Government has brought about a closer link between religion and Society.

Thousands of pilgrims visit such holy places every day. Lakhs of people assemble during the times of Brahmotsavas that happen once a year. Apart from Tamilians many from various parts of India visit the temples in Tamilnadu, throughout the year. Many foreigners do not go back without visiting atleast some of these temples. They visit places like Rameshwaram, Madurai, Palani, Thiruchendur, Chidambaram, Thiruvarangam, Kanchi and Mahabalipuram. They are amazed at the wonderful art and other things seen there. They admire how life is linked with God. There are many great works in Tamil about such glorious temples and the places where they are situated. During the last two centuries many books on holy places have come up. Some of them are translations from Sanskrit. Apart from these, many hymns have been written, praising the (Deity) God in every village. Yet they are of no use for people who do not know Tamil. Pilgrims from the North and many foreigners have only been able to admire and evience surprise. Moreover the festivals in various temples are referred to according to Tamil months. Corresponding English months are given separately in the end. Regarding charges for Archana and Abhisheka and Naivedyams, though they vary slightly at different temples, are acceptable easily even to common people. Some places that are not referred to in the Thevaram also find a place here. Certain places sacred to Lord Muruga are included. I have included a page illustrating the inscriptions in the temples. The names of Saiva & Vaishnava saints are also included in the end. I am sure this book will be of immense help for foreigners who wish to visit the temples in Tamilnadu.

I am very much thankful to the Tirumalai Tirupathi Devasthanam and its executive officer in particular for sanctioning a grant of Rs. 5000/= (five thousand) for this publication.

Many have rendered various help for the publication of this work. The assistance given by Mr. G. Kalyanam Pillai, who was then the Editor of the monthly "Thirukkoil" of Hindu Religious endowments and his colleagues, is invaluable. Srilasri Somasundara Thambiran

head of the Prachara Nilayam of Dharmapuram Adhinam (now Mahasanithanam of Dharmapuram Mutt) has helped me greatly. Many people in various places visited by me had helped me. Many assisted me by lending their books. Many friends had helped during my visits and observations at various temples. Mr. Uppili, M. A., Professor of English, Theagaraja College, now Principal of Sowrastra College, Mathurai and Mr. N. Ramaswamy, Professor of English, Pachaiyappa's College, Madras, have helped me in various ways from the begining. I feel grateful to all these friends.

I pray to God who had guided me and helped me as an invisible guide in the publication of this work.

Tamil Kalai Illam
Madras-30 31—7—65

A. M. PARAMASIVANANDAM

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In 1960 I was asked to write this book by some Bombay firm and I accepted their offer. It took nearly five years for me to visit important places during my holidays and gather informations. I have completed the book in 1965. But only now the book is coming to light, with the help of Tirupati Devasthanam. Because it was written some 20 years ago, some facts are there, as mentioned at the time of writing and the distances are mentioned only in miles. So also some incidents such as Kumbabishekam etc. are mentioned as they were done 'recently' and also references of transports such as T.V.S. Since I did not want to change them I have published as they were. However in the next edition, I want to correct all of them up to date and to include some more sacred places in the book. I have to thank the Tirumalai Thirupathi Devasthanams which was kind enough to help me with their financial assistance of Rs. Five thousand (Rs. 5000/-) for publishing this book, under their scheme "Aid to Publish Religious Books".

Regarding the Photos, the executive officers of Tiruchenkodu and Tiruchendur, sent their temple photos. His holiness, the head of Dharmapura Athinam was kind enough to help me by sending three blocks-two of Sirkazi and one of Vaitheswaran Koil. Some of my friends who are living in Kancheepuram, Tiruchi, Madurai, Thirunelvely, Palani and Nagarkoil had helped me a lot and sent the photos which I wanted. I thank them all.

The archaelogical Department of Tamil Nadu, especially its director Dr. Nagasami and Thiru N. Kasinathan, helped me in getting more than 10 photos including that of an Inscription. I owe much to them.

Regarding the materials, I myself went to many places (some places did not find place in the book) and gathered information. When C. M. Ramachandran chettiar was the Commissioner of Hindu religions endowments, he made arrangements to publish small booklet on each sacred place of Tamil Nadu. Many books were written by one Thiru. Panchanatham Pillai and he was kind enough to send some of them which he had at that time. Archakas of some of the temples had given me informations regarding the dieties and method of worship etc.,

Thiru, J. M. Somasundaram Pillai has written about Nataraja temple of Chidambaram in the Annamalai University publication (University Environs) and I quoted some of his writings with no alterations or additions. So also the Dharmapuram Mutt has published about Tiruvaiyaru (publication 309) and I added the same in this book. I have also taken some paragraphs from Thiru. Jagadeesa Iyer's "South Indian shrines". Some writings of Ananda Kumaraswamy and other distinguished scholars helped me a lot to bring this book in this form. Thiru. J. M. Nallaswami Pillai's writings on Saivisms and Saiva Siddhantha are included in the Appendix. The Madurai District Gazetter was helpful to me to write about the temple city. My thanks are due to them all.

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With the grace of God, I am publishing this book and placed it at the feet of of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati. I hope this book will be of help to foreigners and other people of India who visit Tamilnadu. Once again I thank one and all for all their help in publishing this book.

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A. M. Paramasivanandam
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I INTRODUCTION

Ever since prehistoric times worship of God has been in existence in Tamil Nadu. Some thousands of years ago, man realised the presenee of a Supreme Being that transcends his powers of intellect, his capabilities and his sphere of actions. The words used in Tamil to refer to the supreme Being are connotive: they imply the attributes of God while denoting Him. God is mentioned as "*Kandazhi*", *Kadavul*' and *Iyavul* in Tamil. 'Kandu' means attachment or desire; 'Azhi' means to efface or remove; thus the term means One who has effaced all attachment or desire and One who enables His devotees to do the same. The immanence of God and His transcendence have been stressed in all religions. In Tamil both 'KADAVUL' and IYAVUL' suggest the same attributes. 'KADAUAL' means the Being existing apart from, not subject to limitations of the material universe, IYAVUL suggests His all-pervasive power that holds supreme sway over everthing on earth. Thus God is conceived by the people of Tamil Nadn as desireless; yet He reveals Himsslf as "the atom within the atom", being the life-force of all existence; at the same time He is beyond the universe.

Worship of God must have been coeval with man's knowledge of God. The Tolkappiam, an ancient Tamil classic written nearly a thousand years before the birth of Christ, refers to God and the ways of worshpping Him. It will be seen that the ways of worshipping God have differed from age to age in Tamil Nadu. They serve to suggest the different aspects of the Supreme Being. The three main forms of worship are image or*idol worship, **spirit worship and ***worship of shapeless form. Of these, image worship is of much later origin than the other two. The Sangam literature of some two thousand years ago has no reference to any idol or icon worshipped in a temple, but the '**Silappadikaram** and the **Manimekalai** the twin epics of the second century A.D., mention quite a number of temples of Gods and Goddesses. Polytheism must have come to stay by that time in Tamil Nadu and we find an image or figure attributed to every conceivable God or Goddess and a temple devoted to every one of them. Thus the ancient Tamils of the Sangam age worshipped God as "the one invisible Being without form". This is what is meant by spirit worship or **Aruva valipadu.** The third from of worship aims at a compromise and strikes a balance between the two other forms. The **Aru uruva valipadu** is nothing but the Siva Linga worship and we cannot positively say whether the Sivalinga is of any recognizable form. It is said that the **Linga** worship existed even before the dawn of history. John Marshall and other historians hold that this form of worship is unmistakably indicated in the Indus Valley Civilization. We get authentic information to believe that the same form of worship must have existed in South

*"Uruva valipadu" **"Aruva valipadu" ***Aru uruva valipadu

America long ago. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar says in his "Stone Age in India" that Linga worship must have originated in ancient Tamil Nadu as it existed here even in the Old Stone Age. To sum up, the ancient Tamils first worshipped God as an invisible Being; latter the linga **worship** must have followed suit and thereafter ever so many images and idols came to be worshipped in different temples.

The history of image or idol worship has been traced by many historians in Tamil Nadu. In ancient times there was a custom of worshipping stones in honour of the valiant heroes who sacrificed their lives in the battle-field. Heroism being the supreme virtue, the heroes were considered divine and accordingly worshipped by installing stones in certain places; these stones were supposed to be interfused with the divine sprit of the heroes.

In this manner image worship must have been originated. The Purananuru says

Oṉṉaat tevvar mun niṉru vilaṅki
Olireentu maruppiṉ kaliru erintu viliutena

Kallee paraviṉ allatu
nelukuttup paravum kaṭavulum ilavee (puram 335)

Similarly women noted for their uprightness and chastity were also worshipped after their death, in the form of stone-images. Even today it is not unusual to come across people who worship the pure and chaste women of their *kula* in thelr own homes. The *silappdikaram* refers to a similar worship of Kannaki not only in Tamil Nadu but also elsewhere. Seran Senguttuvan erected a temple in honour of Kannaki, now deemed as the Goddess of chastity. Her figure was carved out of a stone brought by him from the Himalayas. A congregation of kings, witnessed the installation of the image in the temple dedicated to Kannaki. Kings from the north and *kudaku* land, the King of Malava, King Kayabahu of Ceylon and some others were assembed in the Temple on the holy Festival day. Thereafter the image of Kannaki was said to have been taken to different places and worshipped there.

Thus heroes and women of chastity came to be worshipped in carved figures of stone. Some historians believe that this form of worship of deceased human beings gradually led to the worship of Gods and Goddesses. The longing to give a form to a God or a Goddess near to one's heart led to image worship and this in turn led to the moulding of many idols and carving of many statues and building of temples dedicated to them. These temple gradually developed into great centres of religious and cultural activities and they serve as eternal monuments of our culture and our art.

Of the various temples in Tamil Nadu, those of Siva and Vishnu are the largest in number. Of the two, Siva temples outnumbered those of Vishnu. It is said that there are 1008 temples dedicated to Siva while there are only 108 dedicated to Vishnu. Of course some temples included in the number are outside Tamil Nadu. Besides there are 2 or 3 Jain temples. Vishnu is worshipped only in the form of idols or images. The ten avatars of Lord Vishnu are worshipped, especially those of Kirshna and Rama. In the temples of Siva, the *sivalinga* is the *moola vigraha* or the main image in the sanctum sanctorum. Besides, there are also the figures of the Goddess and other deities. All these are carved in stones. Moreover in both Siva and Vishnu temples there are many idols moulded in metals to be taken out for procession. Many are the poets who sang iu honour of the various deities. The devotees of Siva are called *nayanmars* while those of Vishnu are called *alwars*. The songs sung by both classes are steeped in genuine religious fervour, besides being highly poetical. They lived between the third century and the tenth century. The small temples immortalised in their songs later came to be rebuilt on a grand scale by the great rulers of Tamil Nadu, in order to facilitate the ever growing number of devotees, who came to the temples.

There is an interesting theory regarding the history of temples in Tamil Nadu. In ancient times the public used to assemble in every village at a particular place in order to discuss the needs of the village and the grievances of the public. Besides, such places of congregation also served as courts of justice to punish the offender. The meeting of the village public almost always took place under a tree. The good and revered men of the village assembled in the shades cast by the thick foliage of a big tree and passed verdicts; and the public began attaching a certain sanctity to the very place. They felt that God reveals Himself there and enables them to lead a peaceful and happy life. Naturally none dared to utter a lie there; none dared to nurse a guilty thought. They expected, the good men of the village to award justice in all equity and fairness. Thus justice is adminstered in the very presence of God under the tree; naturally the tree and its vicinity came to be looked upon as the most sanctified place in the village. The pipal tree (Arasamaram) and the neem tree (the veepamaram) were the most honoured ones and even today we find such trees being worshipped in Tamil Nadu. Gradually the images of Gods or Goddesses came to be installed under such sancitified trees and even in the middle ages the people felt that God chooses to dwell more under the trees than in the temples. After the third sangam period during the second and third centuries marked by the appearance of the epics like the *Silappadikaram*, small temples were built of brick and mortar around the sanctified trees.

We cannot trace the history of Tamil Nadu between the second and the seventh centuries. However, it is obvious that ever so many changes should have taken place in this dark period regarding the social life of the people. Above all, the changes in the field of religion are remarkable. We come to know of two main sects of religion, Saivism and Vaishnavism at the end of the first century. In the next few centuries Buddhism and Jainism entered Tamil Nadu and though some of the rulers of the Tamil Nadu patronised them to a large extent, Saivism and Vaishnavism were able to withstand the buffets of the other religions and developed in their own lines. To check the growth of Buddhism and Jainism, more and more temples were erected by the rulers with an unprecedented zeal. The great temple at Chidambaram known as **Akayathalam** was built at this time. *To Cenkanan, the Chola king, goes the credit of having built more than seventy temples in his life time. Many other kings and chieftains raised numberless temples and all of them were built of brick.

The Pallavas became dominant in Tamil Nad in the beginning of the seventh century. The most vigorous and spirited religious service rendered by the devotees of Siva and Vishnu eclipsed Jainism. Buddhism was already on the wane. The devotees travelled far and wide, assembled in the temples and popularised the religious hymns and songs. They are said to have worked miracles also to carry conviction.** It is their songs which collectively came to be recognised as the scripture of the Tamils. Those who came later compiled the songs devoted to Siva and Vishnu and gave them the titles of **Thevaram** and **Prabandam** respectively. Both are honoured today as classics of religious literature.

The Tevaram and the Prabhandhas of the great Pallava period contributed largely to the growth of the *Bakthi* cult. Quite a large number of temples were built by the Pallava Kings and others. It must be noted that stone architecture begins with the Pallavas. First they tried their skill in cave temples or sculptured rocks. Their fine sense of beauty and devoted industry enabled them to carve rock in many intricate patterns; thereafter they chose the plains for building temples by heaping stone upon stone. Thus the first stone structure was raised in **Kuram** near **Kancheepuram** by the Pallava kings, **Parameswara** at the end of the seventh century. In course of time the Pallavas built the **Kailasanathar** temple and the Vaigunda perumal temple at Kanchi. The two temples are fine master-pieces of stone structure. Moreover, the history of the period is immortalised in the numerous inscriptions left by the Pallavas.

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*எண்தோள் ஈசற்கு எழில் மாடம் எழுபது செய்தோன் (திருமங்கை ஆழ்வார்)

**Some of the miracles are referred to elsewhere

All the places and temples mentioned in the hymns of the Alwars and the Nayanamars during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, later developed into holy places of pilgrimage. Such places sanctified in the hymns came to be popularly called *"Padal petra thalams"*-places praised by saints. There are said to be 1008 holy temples dedicated to Siva and 108 dedicated to Vishnu. Of them a few are situated outside the State, either in the north or in Kerala, and one or two in Ceylon. The glory of most of these temples in Tamil Land came to be recognised only after the tenth century.

The Saivites and the Vaishnavites consider Chidambaram and Srirangam as the holiest of *Kshetras,* respectively. There are quite a large number of places not mentioned in the Tevaram, as it is available today. This might be due to the fact that no historian ever tried to trace and compile all the hymns before the tenth century. We are immensely indebted to Nambiandar Nambi of a later date who was the first to collect all the hymns, edit and popularised them in the form in which it has reached us.

Though traditionally there are said to be 1008 holy places of Siva temples, we find that only 274 places are mentioned in the Tevaram available to us. These *thalas* have been divided on a geographical basis by our ancestors as follows: 5 in the North; 1 in Tulu land; 32 in Tondai nadu, 22 in Nadu nadu, 190 in Chola nadu, 1 in Malai nadu, 7 in Kongu nadu, 14 in Pandi nadu and 2 in Ceylon. Of these lands, Tondai nadu, Cola Nadu, Kongu nadu, Nadu nadu and Pandi nadu are parts of Tamil Nadu. Thus there are 265 *Sivasthalas* in the state. The later Pandiyas and other wealthy Saivites improved all these temples and made them self-sufficient by quite a large number of charitable endowments. Moreover, the Siva temples at Tanjavoor and **Kangai Konda Chola** puram and the Muruga temples at **Tiruttanikai, Palani, Tiruchendur** etc., became most popular centres of worship for the saivites. The *Tirumurakarrppadai* testifies to the popularity of the six holy places devoted to Lord Muruga, worshipped since the Sangam period.

Of the 108 Vaishnasthalas, 40 are in the Chola nadu, 18 in Pandi nadu, 13, in Malai nadu, 2 in Nadu nadu, 22 in Tondainadu 12 in the North and 1 in Paramapadam. Of them 82 are to be found in Tamil land which continue to flourish as **Divyadesas** (Divine lands).

It is not uncommon to find both Siva and Vishnu worshipped in one and the same temple. The Chidambaram temple offers a good example. Both Nataraja (Siva) and Govindaraja (Vishnu) can be worshipped there. Though popular worship to both Siva and Vishnu in the same place may not be found in

any other temple, we find images of both gods in many temples of Tamil Land. Thus we find *Nilathundaperumal* (Vishnu) chooses to abide in the famous Siva temple of Ekambaranathar at Kancheepuram. Thus we find that Saiviam and Vaishnavism flourished together and did not lead to any fanatical divergence of opinion in the middle ages.

Besides the later Cholas and Pandiyas, the emperors of Vijayanagar claim an important place in the development of the history of temples in Tamil land. Their zeal to check the growth of Islam which spread from the north of India, resulted in the renovation of a many a Hindu temple and large endowments for them. Many of the big temples with their vast corridors and many walls were built by the later Cholas. They badly needed renovation after some hundreds of years. In this connection the valuable services rendered by the munificent merchant community of Nattukkottai Chettiars during the last century and the beginning of this century deserve to be recorded. However, quite a large number of old inscriptions could not withstand the effect of time. The Archaeological Department of India is doing its best in preserving the inscriptions.

The temples of Tamil land were not merely places of worship; every one of them served as a repository for all arts to flourish there. Literature, sculpture, painting, music, dance and drama found a rich soil in the temple to grow. The Vedas and the Tamil hymns were regularly recited there. In fact the life of the people of Tamil Nadu centred round the temple which truly reflected their spirit and culture. It was inevitably linked with the day to day life of the people and the social conditions of the day. That is why we find that every village or part of a town in Tamil Nadu is having a temple of its own.

The importance of the holy trees was not forgotten though the stone structures rose high; we have already noticed that all the temples were built around trees considered holy. Though we cannot find the trees in all temples, the later builders who know of the development of temples, grew the trees pertaining to the places and popularised them in the *Thalapuranas.* (the holy story of the place.) Even today we come across the trees named *Thalavritchas* in the temples and every place has its own *Thalavrutcha*; thus the *Mahila* tree at Tiruvottriyur, the *mango* tree at Kanchcepuram, the white *Naval* tree at Tiruvanaikkaval, the *Kadamdu* tree at Madurai, the jack fruit tree at Kuttralam (Tirunelvelly Dt), the *Patiri* tree at Padirippuliyur are well known. Ofcourse we do not see the *Thalavirutchas* in some temples; perhaps they were blighted in course of time.

Tamil Nadu State consisting of thirteen districts has temples in all of them except the Nilgiris and it is convenient to go into a study of the temples taking district by district. Most of them have been honoured in the Theavaram or the

Prabhandas and the few which are not mentioned in the *Patikas* are also equally famous. At the same time some other temples which can be traced in the religious hymns, are almost ruined and they are discarded today. However the Hindu religious endowment board of the Government is looking after the temples as best as it can. In most of the temples, the poojas are conducted according to the Agamas rites. Besides, the Tevaram and the Brabandas are also recited. Certain temples are noted equally for the sanctity of the deity, the place (Talam) and the thirtha (the sacred water or the tank); certain others are noted for the sanctity of either one or two of them.

There are only a devoted few who have gone to all the temples of Tamil Nadu. In fact many of them are not likely to know the sequestered places where the old, almost discarded temples are situated. The tourists and the pilgrims from the north visit but a few of the most famous temples of the south and ofcourse they give a fairly good idea of the culture and civilisation of the Tamils. As it will not be possible to give a detailed account of all the thousands of temples in Tamil Nadu, I have attempted to deal with at least forty of them which are most popular today. I have tried to point out their greatness, their antiquity, the divine blessings conferred on the devotees of such places and the way in which they render invaluable service to the people in their day to day life. Besides, the study of the numerous inscriptions is of immense help to the historian. There is a saying in Tamil that even the stone will sing a lyric; the full significance of this saying is realised by the man who makes a study of the inscriptions and the sculptures in Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu which are together an essential document to trace the history of our land. The gerat masterpieces of painting and sculpture and the numberless inscriptions offer such a variety of interest that a person can spend his life time in studying them and yet not exhaust the infinite variety. I have made a humble attempt to show how they have contributed richly to the religious, spiritual, intellectual and cultural aspects of life in Tamil Nadu.

The temples are taken district by district; then their structure, their history, the *Puranic* lengend pertaining to them, the idols and images, the festivals, the hymns (Thevaram or Prabandam) the thirtas, and the ways of worship are dealt with one by one. Moreover I will try to trace the history of such places based on the inscriptions found in the temples and elsewhere. I hope this book will serve as an unvaluable guide to all the pilgrims and devotees who throng in thousands in the temples of Tamil Nadu.

II. TEMPLE AND THE COMMUNITY

"Those who have gone to the holy places, worshipped the deities and purified themselves in the *Thirthas* (sacred water) will have the good fortune to be guided by the upright teacher or *Guru*", sang Tayumanavar.

muurtti talam teerttem muraiyaayt totaṅkiṉarkku
vaarttai colac carkuruvum vaaykkum paraaparanee

(paraaparak kaṇṇi)

Thus this verse points out the necessity of a good *Gnanasiriya* for one who longs to have salvation. But it is not easy to find one unless the devotee goes on pilgrimage to all the holy places, worships therein and takes the holy bath; *Gnanasiriya* or the right religious Guru will seek him then to guide him properly. This in turn will lead to the realisation of Godhead.

It is this faith that impels all devotees to go on pilgrimage to the holy places in the country. The lives of **Kavundi Adigal** and **Madalan** as depicted in the *Silappadikaram* testify to the fact that the custom of going on a pilgrimage prevailed in Tamil Nadu even some 1800 years ago. It is the songs sung by the pilgrims in praise of God that later came to be compiled as religious hymns. The great religious leaders of Tamil Nadu have travelled not only in Tamil Nadu but also as far as the Himalayas, in their fervid love of God. Where ever they went it was possible for them to perform miracles for they had divine relations. All pilgrim centres where such miracles happened, flourish today as the holiest of places on earth.

In many of the temples we find sacred tanks, *Thirthams*. In certain places either the rivers flowing by or other ponds near the temples, are considered as *Thirthms*. **Rameswaram** is popular for its twenty one holy places of sacred water. More than the temples, it is the *Thirthams* that are important in certain places. **Danushkodi** is a holy place noted only for its **thirtham**. Similarly **Prayag**. **Gaya** and **Haridwar** of the north are noted only for their **thirthas**.

The *Thirtham* and the Deity (Murthi) derive their importance from the place or situation. There is a Tamil saying that the feet that never tread a holy place are useless.

***tiruppati mitiyaap paatam**
civanati vanaṅkaac cenni

Thus the importance of pilgrimage to the holy places was realised and stressed by the Tamils. Tiruthani, Chidambaram, Madurai, Srirangam, Kanchepuram, Tiruvarur, Palani, Tiruchendur and Tiruvannamalai are some of the most holy places which a pilgrim should never fail to visit. Any book of Ancient Indian History points out the glory of the seven famous pilgrim centres, viz. Ayodhya, Mattra, Maya, Kasi, Kanchi, Avanti and Dwaraka.

Murthi is the deity of the temple. The Deities differ according to the religious faith of the people. The Saivites worship Siva and Parvathi while the Vaishnavites worship Vishnu and Lakshmi in the form of idols. But there are ever so many temples where the different manifestations of Siva and the difierent *Avatars* of Vishnu are worshipped. Of course the Hindu tradition lays down the worship of the three Gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. But we have no temple dedicated to Brahma in our country. There are many legends and puranas which account for the absence of temples of Brahma. Though he is not worshipped we find his image in some of the temples of Tamil Nadu, namely those in Mahabalipuram, Kumbakonam, Tiruvaiyaru, Kandiyoor and Chidambaram. In the first three of the temples the image of Brahma is seen alone, either seated or standing. At Kandiyoor temple, He is seen with Saraswathi. At Chidambaram He is seen seated on a Swan.* (Annavahanam). In all the temples of Siva and Vishnu we come across all the deities connected with either of the religious sects. For example there is no Siva temple wherein we do not find the images of Lord Muruga, Vinayaka and Nandi along with Siva and Uma. Similarly we cannot see a Vishnu temple without the image of Garuda. The size and proportion of the temple depends largely on the number of deities found in it. Before going into a study of the various temples separately, it is necessary to have an idea of the general structure of temples and how they are essentially interlinked with the activities of the community.

Sri P.V. Jagadisa Iyer points out in his book 'South Indian Shrines', that the temples in Tamil Nadu are built according to the *Agama* injunctions and he makes a detailed analysis regarding the situation of every *Murtha* or image. There is a prescribed place for every deity in the temple. The structure of the temples, the place chosen for the various deities, the *Puja's* offered, and all other temple activities were all based on the *Agamas.* As the author points out

> "In the case of the Dravidian temples, the main shrine is situated in the centre and the other accessory buildings stand inside a long rectangular enclosure divided by a high cross wall into two courts, which, according to the importance of the shrine, may amount to as many as seven, and are in such cases styled the *Sapta prakaras.* The eastern, or the entrance

* South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses p. 12-16 (Govt. publication-1916)

court, is entered by a lofty *Gopura* or tower which forms a conspicuous feature at the outset. The lower portion of the *Gopura* upto the lintel and cornice over the high entrance gateway is of stone structure, ornamented with pilasters and niches or projections from the main walls. An ornamental base runs around a cornice surmounting the lower storey. The massive wooden gates, studded with large nails, are placed about a third of the depth of the passage front. The superstructure consists of several storeys, each of them being of smaller area. In early examples these are constructed of stone, but in later structures they are constructed invariably of brick. The lowest of these is entered by a narrow outer staircase from a chamber raised a few feet on each side of the gateway. In each of these chambers is to be found a massive square pier ornamented on the lower part by plaited bands, rosettes, patterns and other floral designs. Above this lower chamber is another similarly situated. The floors above the entrance are reached by ladders through a gangway on the floor. The gopura, or entrace leading to the court inside, considerably lower in elevation than the eastern or entrance one. The tower or *Vimana* on the shrine is almost to its very top ornamented with plaster figures. An ornamental base course, which runs round the open sides of the central shrine, raises the floor several feet above the court. This base is likewise ornamented with dancing figures, rows of elephants and other works of art. The floor is on three levels, the highest of which is the innermost. The piers, which in general are alternately square and polygonal, are surmounted by a deep circular moulded capital with a square abacus. The square portions are covered with mythological figures. A deep cornice runs round the exposed sides of the central shrine and the ceiling is plain with a flat stone terrace.

The principal shrine of the temple stands near the inner or the central court. Its plan consists of a small square or rectangular cell or chamber, called the *Garbhagriha* or the sanctum sanctorum, for the image which is enclosed in a square building, leaving a covered *Pradakshina* or space for the devotees to go round. In front is a passage or double chamber forming the *Ardhamandapa*. This latter building is square or rectangular with a door on the sides and with lofty piers inside. In advance of the ardhamandapa is what is called the *Mahamandapa* consisting of a pillared building with entrance doors and steps on three sides. Besides these two mandapas in front of the central shrine, there are other and more spacious ones, with a *Dais* in one end for the god to be placed on and decorated during festival

occasions. On either side of the front entrance of the ardhamandapa are to be found two colossal figures of *Dwarapalakas* and the two side entrances have ornamental doors likewise. Closeby the inner door of the shrine stand also similar figures of dwarapalakas. An ornamental base surrounds all these buildings. Fine rectangular perforated stone windows of various designs are often seen on the sides of both the antichambers. In front of the sanctum sanctorum is located the Bull in the shrines of Siva temple and the Garuda in the shrines of Vishnu with the platform or *Bali-peetha* and the *Dwaj-astambha* or the flag staff. The principal features of temples are the following:

(1) The *Garbha griha*, or the cell containing the sacred deity, with a *Vimana* or tower over it.

(2) *Mandapas*, or pillared halls, in front of it.

(3) *Gopuras*, or the entrance towers, opening through the walls enclosing the vimanas on all sides generally, but with special reference to the east.

(4) The *Verandah*, or the *Tirumalapatti*, attached to the inside walls of the *Pradakshina*.

(5) *Thirthas* (tanks and wells), held sacred for purposes of bathing.

(6) Subsidiary shrines dedicated to various other minor gods, each in its appropriate place.

According to the *Agamas*, in dealing with the repairs of temple buildings very great care has to be exercised when such ancient structures stand in need of repairs. If any stone happens to be broken, it should be replaced with the same quality of stone, having the same colour and architectural features as the one that is to be replaced. New rods of art should not be introduced on any account. Under these circumstances, a building that has a broken pier or lintel should not be dug out to its foundation, or a new one put up in its place. (South Indian Shrines By P. V. Jagadesa Iyer Pages 13 & 14).

The temple is an indispensable part of every place in Tamil Nadu and there is a poet of the Middle Ages who laid down the dictum that none should choose to live in a place where there is no temple.* The very origin of the temple shows how it is connected with the life of the people. The place where vast shades of trees were cast (considered divine) and where the wise and good men of the village assembled to administer justice was chosen in course of time as the place for the temple. The image installed under the tree was to maintain law and order in the village and it was the presiding deity of the place. The great temples of the Middle Ages enable us to trace the history of Tamil Nadu;

*Konraivendan-Ovvai

Our culture was seen reflected therein, in the sculptures and paintings. All the people assembled there, forgetting their petty quarrels and rivalries. The temple was not only considered as the holiest of places but also as the most clean and healthy place. Besides, the inscriptions on the walls of the temples help us in understanding the history of the times.

In many villages it is the well in the temple that gives a perennial supply of drinking water. There will be ever so many religious and cultural functions taking place in the temple from early morning to midnight. The people in the village will also adjust their daily routine in such a way as to enable them to take part in some of the functions. Varieties of food will be prepared and served to those in service and also devotees in some temples. In certain places it is the temple that feeds many families. The needs of the pilgrims also were not forgotten. Ofcourse today we have many hotels in all important pilgrim centres and we do not entirely depend upon the food served in temples. However, hotels can never be a substitute for temples. Even today it is the temple food that serves to ward off starvation in many families living in villages for it is less costly and more healthy and pure than food served in hotels. Tirupathi, Srirangam, Chidambaram and Madurai are noted for articles of food in temples, besides other smaller temples In certain temples food is served gratis to a prescribed number. Many wealthy citizens who lived in the Middle ages have generously bestowed a part of their property to the temples in order to feed the devotees and we come to know of many such charitable endowments of lands etc. from the inscriptions.

The ever growing wealth of the temples in Tamil Nadu is diverted in charitable purposes. On festival days we find many people offering costly jewels and other valuable possessions to God. Tirupathi is one such place noted for the maximum offerings. There are others who offer all they have to temples; besides money and jewels, animals are also gifted away to temples. The temple bull is the noted among all animals; it is not to be ill-treated and it is allowed to roam about as it pleases, and graze wherever possible.* It must be noted that all the wealth accruing to the temple is to be used for the welfare of the people. Thus we have today many educational institutions like Colleges and even Universities run by temple funds. There are many temples in Tamil Nadu endowed with large immovable properties like lands and also houses in towns. The tenants pay the annual rent to the temples either in kind or cash and this rental income enables the temple authorities to employ hundreds of people for temple administration. During the festivals, thousands of people throng who belong to various merchant communities. This in turn gives rise to barter and growth of merchandise. Thus the temple also serves as the economic centre of Tamil Nadu.

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* It is interesting to note that an aimless wanderer is often humorously referred to as the temple bull.

Arts like music, poetry and dance also find a place in temples. The *oduvars* recite *Thevaram* and other religious songs while the Sanskrit scholars recite the Vedas. The spacious **mantapams** of the temples serve as places of congregation where the devout disciples were taught the **Vedas**, the Tamil Scriptural canons and the **Prabandas**. It is only when we remember this fact, we realise the usefulness of the spacious mantaps and other corridors of temples built by the rulers of Tamil Nadu in the middle ages. They were more or less indigenous centres of art and culture in Tamil Nadu. The mantaps served as stages for any First Performance of Dance recitals or Drama. Some of the big mantaps were used for purposes of great conferences of religious discourse or for some important social or domestic functions. Many marriages are also conducted in the thousand pillared mantaps. To quote one example the mantap at Ekambaranathar Koil at Kancheepuram serves this purpose on Panguni Uttiram Day. It is no exaggeration to say that all the **mantaps** and **prakaras** of temple where dance recitals and religious discourses took place, actually served the purpose of a University in every place. Besides functioning as the educational centre of the place, the temple helped the growth of arts by making free gifts of lands to great scholars, musicians, sculptors and other artists. Such temple patronage is not uncommon even today. **Thiruvotriyur** inscriptions refer to a similar *manyam* (free gift of land) made to a great grammarian. Moreover there were various musical instruments used in the temples of which a few have been mentioned by the great composers of the *Thevaram.* It is unfortunate that we know only their names for most of them are no longer used today.

Thus the temples patronized the arts of the people and also helped to maintain a certain economic stability. Besides, they also took care of the health and welfare of the people. The *Thirumukkudal* Inscriptions on the banks of the river *Palar* indicate that a very big hospital was run by the temple which contained quite a large number of beds for in-patients. We have already seen how food was distributed in temples. Mostly it will be free from chillies but only pepper will be added; ghee was usually preferred to any oil; certain costly spices were added to give flavour. Such food was served either free of cost or at a considerably cheap rate.

Normally a temple will be situated in the heart of a place or in its out-skirts. The choice was always an eminent, airy place. The outer corridors are full of windows and easements and vast door-ways. There are also *sulas* installed at the at of the Towers. It is interesting to note that they served as shock absorbers against lightning. Similarly the copper *kalasas* also protect the towers from damages that might be caused by thunder. The tanks in and around the temples

helped to remove water-famine. Though most of the tanks are either damaged or dried up today, they rendered yeomen service to the people in the past. Of course there are some instances when the tank water was used to put out large fires. The groves and gardens of the temple ensured a perennial supply of fruits and flowers to the people around and there are many inscriptions left by the rulers and other rich men of the middle ages who have endowed largely to the upkeep of the groves & gardens.

The ancient poets point out the real purpose of the annual festivals conducted in temples. They remove enmity and disease among the people. The Manimekalai for example has a passage wherein the old *Valluvan* refers to the days of festivals and their significance.

First whatever might be the jealousies and rivalries among the people they should forget them all when they join together in a great concourse to worship God. When they assemble in this spirit of spiritual uplift the needs of the body also are not to be forgotten. Water and butter-milk are also served in *Thannir pandals* and food is served in choultries. Moreover they pray that all should be blessed with a long life and prosperity. Most of the festivals or *Virathas* (penances) are thus intended to ward off diseases and poverty. They are also conducted to pray to the Gods for regular rainfall in proper seasons. Thus the *Poojas* conducted everyday and the annual festivals bring in material prosperity besides satisfying the divine aspirations of the people.

As we have already seen there is no ancient temple without inscriptions in Tamil Nadu. They enable us to understand the history of Tamil Nadu and also the day to day life of the common people, their culture and their civilisation. The Government of India does its best to bring out the inscriptions to the notice of the public, in addition to the copper plates and other historical records. However, much more remains to the arts, achitecture etc. of the temples of Tamil Nadu. It was during the last century that many *Puranic* lengends were attributed to all the sacred places which came to be popularly called *Sthalapuranas.* Of course most of them are not extant today. However we have many stories concerning the temples which have reached us, handed down from generation to generation. We do not have recourse to these stories for historical truth but they contain in them fine imaginative flight and great morals of life. About forty temples of Tamil Nadu are taken into account in this book. A detailed analysis of the different aspects of these temple activities gives us a fairly good idea of the culture and civilisation of the Tamils.

III MADRAS

I. Triplicane

Madras is a big city consisting of many townships; naturally there are many temples here. But only two temples-the Parthasarathy Temple at Triplicane and Kapaliswarar Temple at Mylapore are pre-eminent, of which the former is a famous Vaishnava Temple and the latter, an equally famous Siva Temple. Both have been immortalised in the songs of *Alwars* and *nayanmars* respectively; both are noted for their Thala Puranas and their antiquity and both have continued to be places of pilgrimage since 1300 years. During festivals connected with both temples people gather in lakhs to worship. Therefore as far as Madras is concerned it is enough to deal with these two temples.

Triplicane is one of the famous 108 Vaishnava places of pilgrimage. It is also called *Brindaranya kshetra* (The holy place that abounds in *Tulsi* plants). As the sacred tank is full of white lilies the whole place is called *Thiruvallikeni* (a tank of beautiful lilies). Three of the twelve Alwars have honoured this temple in their songs. They are **Peyalwar, Thirumalisai Alwar** and **Thirumangai Alwar.**

The temple is situated in about two furlongs from the sea, in a part of Triplicane that is densely populated. It is two miles to the South-east of the Central Station and two and a half miles from the Egmore Station. From any part of Madras there are buses frequently plying to Triplicane. Though there are no big choultries attached to the temple there are plenty of lodging houses and hotels near the temple.

There are five *Murthis* worshipped in the temple honoured by *Thirumangai Alwar* in his *Periatirumozhi.* All pilgrims who return from Tirupathi are traditionally said to take their holy bath in the sea and worship Parthasarathy. The *Saptha rishis* are said to have worshipped the five idols here, of whom Parthasarathy is most important. He is also called Geethacharya and Venkata Krishnaswami. The *Brahmanda purana* says that King *Sumati* worshipped the Lord at Tirupathi longing to see Him in the form of the Divine Charioteer. The Lord was pleased with his penance appeared in his dream and promised to fulfil his wishes at Thiruvallikeni. Thus Sumati worshipped Parthasarathy in this place. Besides, it is also said that **Athreya Maharishi**, a disciple of Veda Vyasa came here on his teacher's command, took the holy bath and meditated on the Lord in the *Tulsi vanam.* It is said that Veda Vyasa sent the idol to Athreya and it was the same which was installed and worshipped by King

Sumati. He worshipped the Lord according to *Vaikhanasa agama* rites. On the two sides of the idol we find the image of Rukmani and Sathaki, the Lord's younger brother. The images of Balarama, (the Lord's elder brother) Bradyumnan (His son), and Anirudna (His grandson) are placed a little to the north of the idol Rukmani. Thus Lord Krishna is seen here in the midst of all the members of His family. This is a unique feature of this temple. Moreover Goddess Lakshmi also is seen on the bosom of the Lord. A Golden Sword glitters on the leftern side of the *moolavar* which signifies the torch of knowledge.

The face of *Utchava* **murthi** is dented and scarred; but yet it shines with a divine effulgence. It is a great wonder to see how the golden shine of the idol during the **Thirumanjana** (the sacred bath of the idol or abhisheka) gradually fades into a dark blue colour of Lord Krihna soon after it.

The idol that comes next in importance is that of Mannathaswamy or Aranganathar. Goddess Lakshmi who was at variance with Lord Vishnu at Parkkadal came to Brindaranya and was brought up by Brigu Maharishi. It is said that Lord Vishnu came in the figure of a handsome brahmin youth and married her on the *Dwa Dasi* (the twelveth day) of *Sukla patcha* during the month of *masi.* It was Lakshmi's wish that the Lord should bestow all material prosperity and spiritual bliss on all the devotees who choose to worship Him on this holy day. Adjoining this *Sannadhi*, the idols of Adisesha, Brahma, Narasimha and Varada are found. The image of Vedavalli Thayar, Goddess Lakshmi's manifestation, is found in another place. The sacred marriage day is celebrated annually in all splendour on the *Uttira* Day in the month of *Panguni.*

There is another *sannadhi* or small temple of *Thelliyasinga perumal* or Narasingaperumal, facing west just behind Parthasarathi *sannadhi.* The **Puranas** say that Atri **Maharishi** did *thavam* (penance) here and saw the divine vision of God. *Brahmotsava* takes place in the month of Ani to honour Narasinga and the floating festival and other festivals are also celebrated.

There is another *sannadhi* where we find Rama, Lakshmana and Mythili (Sita) as they revealed themselves to *Maduma Maharishi.* Hanumar is honoured in a separate *Sannadhi.* There are various festivals taking place in honour of these deities like the *Brahmotsava.*

There is also the *Gajendra Varadarajaswamy* Sannadhi worshipped by *Saptharoma Maharishi* according to Vaikhanasa Agama. The story of *Gajendra-moksha* (The Salvation of Gajendra or the king of Elephants) is well known. The *moolavar* is seen on a *Garuda* wielding the conch (sangu) and the wheel (chakra). Every month on the *Hastha* day a festival is conducted in honour of this deity.

The image of Andal is situated in a separate *moolasthanam.* The *Puooram* festival in *Adi* and the *Tirumanjanam* in *Margali* are the holy festivals in honour of the Goddess.

Moreover, all the Alwars and Acharyas are also worshipped in this temple. There is a *mantap* called "*Tiruvaymoli mantap*". This is named after the great *Prabanda* of Nammalwar. We find the idols of great religious teachers and exponents like Alawandar, Ramanujar, Manavala Mamunikal, Vedanta Desikar and also Tirukkachi Nambi. There are separate temples for Peyalwar, Nammalwar and Tirumalisai Alwar. Besides *Moolavar* images for all these *Alwars,* there are also *Utsavamurthis* and there are ever so many festivals conducted in honour of them.

The *Pujas* in the temple take place according to *Thennacharya* tradition or *Sampradaya* as laid down by Manavala Mamunikal. The divine *Prabandas* are also recited. The two most famous festivals are *Pahalpattu* and *Irappattu* which take place before and after the *Vaikuuda Ekadasi* during *Marhali.* The idol is adorned in many forms and worshipped during *Pahalpattu*; many religious discourses and music performances take place during *Irappattu.* On the last day of Irappattu, all the divine songs of Nammalwar are recited as the idol of the Alwar is put at the feet of Lord Parthasarathi and worshipped with *Tulasi.* The *Brammotsava* for Parthasarthi Swami takes place in *Chitirai* and this festial continues for tens days in all splendour. In the **Karavini** *Thirtha* or the tank opposite the temple, the *Teppootsava* or the Floating car festival takes place for seven days beginning from the New Moon day in *Masi.*

Ramanuja, the great religious teacher who popularised the *Visistadwaita* school of philosophy, is also honoured in the temple. It is said that Parthasarathi Swami appeared in the dreams of his parents and foretold that He Himself would be born as a son to them in order to clearly expound the *Gita.*

Though the temple is an ancient one, it has been periodically renovated by many devotees. We understand from a *Pasura* of Tirmangai Alwar that the temple was built by a king, Tondayarkon.* Perhaps the sanctum sanctorum where the Moolavar is found might have been constructed by him. He must have lived some 1700 years ago. Many kings and devout wealthy men who came thereafter must have expanded the temple to its present size by constructing the various parts of the same from time to time. The temple and the tower, the tank, and other mantaps look new today. For some time the Dutch owned this temple in the 17th century; then it passed on to the East India Company; In 1843 it was

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teṉṉaṉ toṇṭaiyarkoṉ ceyta naṉmayilait tiruvallik keeṇi niṉṟaaṉai

*தென்னன் தொண்டையர் கோன் செய்த நன்மயிலைத்
திருவல்லிக்கேணி நின்றானை (திருவாய் மொழி 2-3-10)

recorded as the property of the local public. At a time when the Western Power were fighting with each other and pillaging the properties of all great institutions, the valuable idols of this temple were preserved with great care and caution by the people.

There are many valuable inscriptions in the temple. There is one by Dantivarma Pallava who ruled between 779 and 830 A.D. The *mantaps* are full of fine sculptures and some of them were built before the Pallava period. Most of the inscriptions refer to many charitable endowments to the temple. The later Cholas, the Pandiyas and the rulers of Vijayanagar Empire have left them. When the Vijayanagar rulers renovated the temple many old inscriptions have been shifted to less prominent places in the temple. Most of the inscriptions are in Tamil; there is one in Telugu.

The foreign tourists are full of praise for the structure of the temple, the mantap, the tank and the golden *Kalasas* at the tower. Situated in the most busy part of the town today, it serves to turn the attention of the people in sick hurry towards God and the divine turths of life. It is so old and yet so new in so far as thousands throng to worship there. No visitor to Madras ever missess to worshiop Lord Parthasarathy.

MADRAS

2. Mylapore or Tirumayilai

Mylapore, the famoue *Sivasthala* is situated about a mile to the south of Triplicane. In fact Tirumangai Alwar refers to the Lord at Tiruvallikkeni as "**Tirumayilai-Tiruvallikkeni Ninrani**". Thus these two adjacent parts of Madras are usually associated with each other. This place is about four miles from the Central or Egmore Station. It is easily accessible from any part of Madras. Though there are no good and clean choultries, there are many lodgings here. The big tank and the temple on the eastern bank provide a calm and fine atmosphere. It is said that once the temple was near the seahore. It was built some 300 years ago. It is said that the older temple near the seashore fell in the hands of the Portugese during the 16th and 17th centuries and thereafter this temple was built. The older temple is said to have been situated by the side of the church of St. Thomas. It is also said that the remnants of the temple its pillars etc. were found immersed in the sea 60 years ago.

This temple as it stands today was erected during the time of the Nawabs. The Vijayanagar rulers are credited with having built it. As there are no inscriptions to be found anywhere, in the temple, it must have been built only

recently. Though it does not belong to antiquity, there are many stories or puranic legends ascribed to it. This place seems to have been popular even during the last *Sangam* period, i.e., the first and the second centuries A.D *Tiruvalluvar*, the great author of the *Kural* was born here and there is also a temple dedicated to him where pujas and festivals take place regularly. During the seventh century *Tirugnana Sambandar* came to Mylapore and miraculously converted bones into a girl. It is said that one *Sivanesa Chettiar* kept the ashes or the remains of his daughter **Poombavai** (who died all on a sudden) in an urn. When he heard about the great saint *Sambandar* staying at Tiruvorryur (a suberb of Madras) he approached him, brought him to his place, worshipped him and begged him to revive his daughter, after placing the pot of remains before him. Gnanasambandar sang ten divine songs and prayed to the Lord :

maṭiṭṭa puṉṉai yankaaṉal maṭamayilai
kaṭṭiṭṭan koṇṭaaṉ kapaaliicaram amarntaaṉ
oṭṭiṭṭa paṇpiṉ uruttira palkaṇattaar
aṭṭiṭṭal kaaṇaatee pootiyoo puumpaavaay

(Mayilai-paaṭṭu. I.)

and Poombavai came back to life. This incident is even now remembered in the form of a festival. Besides Gnanasambandar, *Tirunavukarasar and Sundarar* have also praised the Lord of this place in their divine hymns. The *Sthala-purana* says that as the deity was worshipped by Brahma, He came to be called Kapaleeswarar. As Uma or Parvathi is said to have worshipped the lord in the figure of a peacock, the place is called *mayilapuri, mylapore* or *mayilai.* Lord Muruga was gifted with his *Vel* after worshipping Kapaleeswara. The Moolavar of *Singaravadivela* is found in a separate place. Tradition holds that even Lord Vishnu worshipped the Lord and received His blessings. Of the 63 Nayanmars, *Vaayila Nayinar* was born here. The *Sthalapurana* says that Siva Himself told Parvathi that any devotee of Kapaleeswara is assured of material prosperity and salvation.

The *Sannadhi* faces west here. Normally the Sannadhi (or the place where the *Linga* is situated) will face the east in all temples and the Sannadhi of Nataraja will always be facing the south. Nobody is able to account for the unique situation of the Sannadhi in this temple. The *Rajagopura* and the Main temple are in the eastern direction. Towards the west we find the big tank or 'the sacred tank of lotus'. The temple is ofcourse very small in structure but it is a famous one. It has been recently renovated. The very precincts of the temple are suffused with a certain divinity " that passeth understanding ".

Kapaleeswara in the form of the *Linga* is found in the innermost part of the temple, facing west. Ofcourse we do not go near the image but it is so majestic that it is visible even from one end of the *Prahara.* When we go round the *Praharas,* we come across the images of the 63 Nayanmars, Sandeeswara, Dakshinamurthy and Lingothpava. There are also the *Utsavamurthis* of the 63 Nayanmars. The image of Lord Nataraja is facing south, to the right side of the main temple and Lord Shanmuga is also there. On the other side we find the images of Somaskanda, Uma (Parvathi) and other *Utsavamurthis.* Outside the narrow praharas, we find the other sannathis. The image of Karpagambal is found to the right as we come out of the prahara of the main temple. The image is so natural in the standing pose that we feel the divine presence of the Goddess. There is a prahara around this sannadhi also. We can have a view of both the Lord and the Goddess from the centre of the mantap and worship them at the same time.

All around the two sannathis, we find some *murthis.* We find Vinayaka at the entrance of the Eastern tower. When we turn south, we find Singaravadivel or Lord Muruga. In the south western corner of the temple we find the *Utsavamantap* or the mantap where the deities are adorned for purposes of festival and procession and another small temple in the mantap. The *Dwajasthamba* rises majestically in front of the Kapaleeswarar sannadhi. Besides it, to the north we find a temple of Gnanasambanda and Poongothai. Beyond these we find the images of the *Navagrahas* or the nine planet-lords.

The *Pujas* take place daily thrice in the temple. At 5-30 p m. the *Pujas* are conducted to the accompaniment of the ricital of the *Vedas,* the *Thevaram* and the *Natasuram.* The daily pujas are over with the *Arthajamam* or the Puja when the lord goes to bed. Every Friday we find thousands of people turning to the temple for worship. Thursday is a holy day for worshipping Dakshinamurthy.

There are special *Pujas* and festivals conducted on all important and holy days in a month. The following day are thus important : *Pradosha,* the full moon day, the New moon day, *Krithika, Visaka, Revathi* and *Tiruvaadirai.* The spring festival or Vasantha Vizha is celebrated on a grand scale in Chitrai for ten days. During *Vaikasi,* Tirugnanasambandar is worshipped in a festival for 10 days. In the course of these days the life history of the great saint is traced and on the ninth day the festival is to honour the miracle wrought by him. During *Ani,* the birth day of Manickavasagar is celebrated ; In *Adi* on the *Puram* day the image of Karpagambal is covered with Sandal paste (Sandankkappu vizha) and worshipped. On the *Moola* day in *Avani,* the famous *Pittu* festival of Madurai is celebrated here also. On the first Sunday of the month the *Tirumurai** *Festival*

*The religious songs of the Saivaite leaders have been compiled in 12 sacred books. (பன்னிரு திருமுறை)

will be conducted. On the full moon day in the month of *Purattasi,* the big *Mantap* will be adorned with festoons of various fruits and Chandrasekara will be worshipped there during the festival. The *Kolu* or Navarathri festival will also be conducted. During *Aippasi,* the *Skandasashti* is an important festival in honour of Lord Muruga. During *Karthikai* is conducted the *Vilakkidu* or the festival of lights. On all the thirty days in the month of *Margali,* special *Pujas* known as *Danurmada Puja* are offered early in the morning. On the last ten days of the month, the Thiruvembavai festival of Manickavasagar will be celebrated.** During *Thai,* Sankaranthi and Pusa vizha are conducted. *Masi* is noted for the *Maham* festival and Garden festival in honour of Lord Muruga. The Brahmotsava is celebrated in Panguni in a grand and impressive manner for ten days. Both in mornings and evenings all the five idols (Siva, Uma, Muruga, Vinayaka and Sandeswara) are taken in procession. The eighth day is the most auspicious and important day of the festival. Accompanied by the 63 images of the Nayanmars, Lord Kapaleswara will be taken in procession thereafter. It is on this day that almost all citizens of Madras throng in Mylapore and it practically presents a greatmass of humanity. Almost all shops in the city are closed and a holiday is declared for a few hours that day. Just to facilitate the procession all the four spacious *mada* streets around the tank are kept neat and tidy. In fact the city of Mylapore is beautifully planned with the vast and neat roads surrounding the tank and with the temple in the heart of the city. The aristocrats and great officials choose to live in and around Mylapore and this fact itself shows its importance.

Let us now consider the *thirthas* of this temple. The big tank to the west of the temple is the most important *Kapalithirtha.* It is held as a faith that anybody who takes a holy bath in this sacred tank on the Full Moon Day, Sunday or the Onam Day (in *Aippasi*) and worships the Lord will be freed from his sins and have the blessings of God. This sacred tank is also called *Sakthi Ganga* in view of the belief that Sakthi or Uma had her holy bath in the tank and thus purified hereself before worshipping the Lord. The water never dries up in the tank; it is also said that it is never infested with toads; similarly no fish is said to be found in the sacred tankat Tiruvallikkeni. Besides there are also other *thirthas* which are not so popular, viz: *Kadavul* thirtha, *Veda* thirtha, *Vaali* thirtha, *Gangai* thirtha, *Velli* thirtha and *Rama* thirtha.

We have already seen that there are no inscriptions to be found in the temple. Perhaps the older one that is said to have existed near the seashore had many of them. The Rajagopura or the Eastern Tower has been recently renovated and it is admired by all tourists and devotees.

**The Tiruvembavai is a collection of songs composed by Manickavasagar and these are sung by virgins early in the morning to ensure happy wedded life.

All the *Pujas* in the temple are done according to the *Agama* rites or *Vedic* rites. There are no separate charges prescribed for *Archanas* or *Abishekas.*

Lord Kapaliswara and Lord Parthasarathi may well be entitled the presiding Deities of the City of Madras.

CHINGLEPATTU DISTRICT

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3. Thiruthanigai

Ever since some thousands of years Lord Muruga has been worshipped by the people of Tamil Nadu as their favourite deity. We find many references to Him in the ancient Tamil Grammar, the *Tolkappiam* and the other - Sangam Works. The *Tirumurukatruppadai* composed nearly two thousand years ago by Nakkirar is almost the earliest of religious poems of Tamil Nadu and we find the poet invoking Lord Muruga's blessings before he mentions the names of other Gods. Skanda and Subramanya are some of the other names of this God. Nakkirar sings of Him as one who loves to dwell on mountains; the *Tolkappiam* also considers Him as God of mountains. Naturally we find all the temples dedicated to Lord Muruga are mostly situated on hills. *Tiruttani* is the most sacred of all the *Sthalas* of Lord Muruga and now it is situated in the nothern border of Tamil Nadu in Chinglepattu District.

The *Kanthapuranam* showes how Muruga himself enlightens Valli on the glories of this place. Sthalapurana of this place written by Sage Katchiyappar is easily the best of its kind noted for the literary merits as well. Even today it continues to be one of the most famous pilgrim centres of India. This place is also known by many other names like *Thanikachalam, Thanikai, Thiruthanigai, Neelagiri, Neelorpalagiri, Urpalasaylam, Kuvalaichigari, Kanigaverpu, Kallaragiri, Kavimalai, Sengalunirkunram, Sengalvakiri, Kandakiri, Indranagari, Nandappriyam* etc. After having vanquished Surapadma in the battle, Muruga is said to have come here and settled on the hills till His fury cooled off. Hence the name Thanikai. Later the prefix *Thiru* was added as a mark of prosperity. Muruga himself thus accounts for this name in the *Kanthapurana*

> Ceṅkaṉ veyyacuure ceruttolilinum cilaiveeṭar
> taṅkalirceyum cerut tolilinum taṉintiṭṭee
> inkuwantu yaam iruttalaal ceruttaṉi eṉroor
> maṅkalantaru peyriṉaip perrativ varaiyee
>
> (kanta-valli. 216)

Lord Muruga continues to sing the glories of this Sacred Hill as follows:

"Just as the Lotus is the best of all flowers, the Ganges of all rivers, and Kanchipuram of all cities of the world, the Thanikai Mountain is the supreme among all mountains". Here the Lord engages Himself in the *Leela* of playing on the various musical instruments in order to bring down his rage. The *Gandamadana* Hills near the **Mount Kailas**, the favourite resort of Muruga is not so pleasing to Him as the Thanikai. Indira is said to have created three divine ponds here, caused three different types of flowers to blossom there in three periods of the day, offered them to Muruga regularly and thus attained His blessings by constant devotion. The flowers are said to be Nilorpala hence the names of the place such as Nilagiri, Nilotpalagiri, Kavimalai, Sengazunirkunram ,etc. Because of the association of Indira, the mountain is also named Indiragiri. The three divine ponds continue to be the *Thirthas* of the place. Lord Muruga also details the blessings devolving on those who worship Him here. Those who have a dip in the three *Thirthas* and worship the Lord attain *Moksha* or *Sayujya* being at once relieved of their sins. They are blessed with all prosperity as long as they live and enjoy divine Bliss after death. If anybody, be he a man or a *Deva*, does not worship the Lord here, he is deemed to be inert, worse than the vegetable kingdom and he has no hope of salvation. Even a little kindness or charity evinced here brings manifold blessings on one. After having detailed the glories of the *Sthala* to Valli, Lord Muruga Himself made a *Peeda Linga*, one of the Five divine manifestations of Lord Siva, worshipped it and received the Lord's blessings.

Besides the three *Thirthas* mentioned above, there is another big *Thirtha* at the foot of the Hills called *Saravana Poigai*. The *theppam* festival on the *Kritigai* day of the month *Adi*, coming every year, is a famous one. On the two sides of the Hill of Muruga, we find two hills, one a little whitish and the other dark brown; hence their names are *Pacharisi malai* and *Pinnakku malai*.

The *Sashti* and *Krithiga* days of every month are the most holy days of Lord Muruga. Thousands of people throng here on these days coming from Tamil Nadu, Andhra and other States. Of all *Krithiga* days, those of the months *Adi*, *Karthigai* and *Masi* are the most holy ones. The mountain, as it is, is very small in size; the shrine above is easily accessible with steps leading to it. For the past few years quite a large number of devotees assemble here on December 31st and January 1st also to worship Muruga in connection with the New Year of the English Calender. Thus this is the only temple where the English New Year is celebrated as a festival. On the *Mahasivarathri* day falling in the month of *Masi*, the 1008 *Sangabishekam* takes place; the daily pujas are carried out according to the *Agama* injunctions and the structure of the temple also conforms to the same. The Brahmotsava and Sashti festival are quite famous. Most of them are celebrated on the Hill. Only on a few occasions like the *Theppam* festival Lord Muruga condescends to step down the Hill.

As for the *Puranas* of the place, Katchiyappar's *Thanikai Puranam* is well known. As already mentioned it is noted for its literary beauty as well. We have also another *Purana* dedicated to this place—Kandappa Desikar's *Dhanikachala Purana*. It must be remembered that this holy place is mentioned in many literary works since the Sangam Age. Arunagirinathar sings the glories of the Lord of this place in his famous *tiruppugazh, Kandaralangaram, Kandaranuputhi* etc. Moreover there are many other works like *thanikai Patirruppattandati, Thanikai Arruppaddai, Sannithi murai, Thanikachala Anubhuthi* and so on. Ramalinga Swamigal of Vadalur who lived in the last century (19th) has also sung the praises of *Muruga* of this place in many *Thirupathigas* (holy songs dedicated to a place).

There is also an old temple of Lord Siva besides the Muruga shrine. It is called *Virattaneswarar temple.* Aparajitha, the last Pallava King of 9th century raised this temple. Though not noted for works of sculptural beauty, the structure of the temple is essentially of the Pallava style of architecture. Of course the Muruga temple situated above is much older than this but the structure of the former temple looks new for it was rebuilt only a few hundred years ago while the Siva temple was built nearly a thousand years ago. There are many Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit inscriptions found here of which the Tamil inscriptions are large in number. These belong to the periods of Rajaraja Chola and Rajendra Chola and Aparajita Pallava; a few of them belong to the period of Vijayanagar rulers.

Thiruthanikai is situated some fifty miles to the northwest of Madras Until recently it belonged to the Andhra State; in April 1960 it was merged with Madras State as part of the Chinglepattu District. There are fine roads that run *Via* Kanchipuram or Tiruvallur from Madras to this place. It is the first big Station 8 miles to the north of Arakkonam Junction, in the Madras—Bombay line. The *Saravana Poigai* or the holy tank at the foot of the Hills is about a mile from the Railway station. To facilitate the evergrowing number of pilgrims, the steps leading to the shrine are well lighted. Though not a big city, we find many Government Offices, this being the Taluq centre.

Of course there are many choultries but most of them are functioning on a communal basis, catering to the needs of particular castes; but as almost all communities are represented in the separate choultries, no great difficulty will be experienced by the pilgrims who choose to stay there. Moreover many marriages and other social functions are also conducted in the choultries throughout the year. However it is an unfortunate fact that there are no good hotels in the city; nor are there enough facilities in the choultries where no rent is collected for stay. Now the Devasthanam has Constructed many Cottages and rooms for the pilgrims.

Abishekas, festival *Archanas* and *Deeparadhanas* may be arranged for the Deity by paying prescribed sums to the Devasthanam; charges range from Rs. 25/- for the festivals; *Abishekas* with milk or *Vibuthi* are performed for lesser amounts also. A moderate sum is to be paid for *Archanas* and arrangements may be made for celebration of marriages also in the temple. Thus the Tiruthanikai temple serves as an eternal source of divine inspiration to all lovers of Lord Muruga, linked intimately, as it is, with the day-to-day life of the people.

Here is one of the Holy songs dedicated to Lord Muruga of Tiruttanikai:

vempum uyirukku oor uravaay
veelai namaṉum varuvaaṉeel
tampi tamaiyaṉ tuṉaiyaamoo
taṉaiyar maṉaivi varuvaaroo
umpar paravum Tiruttaṇikai
uyarmaa malaimeel iruppavarku
tumpak kuṭalai eṭukkaamal
tukka uṭalai eṭutteenee

(Iraamalingar)

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4. TIRUVALANGADU

Lord Nataraja, found in all Siva temples, is the famous Deity of the people in Tamil Nadu; His divine form has elicited admiration from all foreigners as a perfect work of art as well. The Saivites believe that the form is a divine manifestation of the five functions of God viz. *Sristi*—creation, or evolution from the drum ;—*Stithi*—preservation or continuation from the hand of hope—the *Abhaya Hasta*; *Samhara*—destruction from fire; *tirobhava*, veiling, illusion or concealment, from the foot held aloft; and *Anugraha* release-Salvation or bestowal of grace from the fourth hand pointing to the lifted foot wherein to seek refuge of the soul. There are five temples solely dedicated to Natarja in Tamil Nadu :—Tiruvalangadu in the north is one of them. The rest are to be found at Chidambaram, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Kurralam. The Court—Hall where the Lord is dancing in bliss is conceived in different ways in the five places sacred to Him. At Tiruvalangadu, the *Sabah* or Court-Hall is named to be one studded with gems (*Ratna Saba*); at Chidambaram, it is of gold (Porsaba); at Madurai it is said to be of silver (Velliambalam); at Tirunelveli, it is of copper (Tambara Saba) and at Kurralam, it is called *Chitra Saba* (of wood with architecture). Thus Tiruvalangadu boasts of the wealthiest *Saba*; however, it is rather ironical that the other places of the Lord flourish as great cities today while Tiruvalangadu is just a village. The name is said to have come from the fact that the place was once noted for its dence growth of banyan trees.

Tiruvalangadu, 30 miles west of Madras, is situated in the Madras-Arkonam line. The village is two miles away from the Station. This has been recently merged with Tamil Nadu. Though there are no good hotels to stay, a few choulries are there. Of course pilgrims do not throng in large numbers on any occasion but yet there is a continual flow of them throughout the year. There is also a gravel path to this village from Tiruvallur.

The *Sthalapurana* says that Sage Sunanda of the Himalayas desired ardently to witness the divine dance of Siva; the Lord was moved by his prayer and asked him to go to Tiruvalangadu and do penance there, to fulfil his wish. The Sage came to this place accordingly and did the penance for such a long time that he was covered by a hill of loose sands caused by termites on which certain reeds called *Munjam* began growing. The Sage was thereafter called **Munjikesa.** In the meanwhile, *Karkodaka*, the Serpent adorning Siva's hand, was said to have emitted its poison on His hand; the Lord ordained that the serpent should creep to Tiruvalangadu where the Sage was meditating on Him and promised to shower His Grace on it when He would bless the Sage with a vision of His Divine Dance. Some say that both the Sage and the Serpent are called *Vyakrapathar* and *Pathanjali Munivar*.

Moreover, two *Asuras* by name *Nimban* and *Sumban* were causing terror to all at Tiruvalangadu. The sages complained to Siva at Kailash of their atrocities. Parvathi took pity on the sages and Her glance of pity developed into divine fury which resulted in the creation of Kali, accompanied by a host of fearful Spirits. Kali reached Alangadu, destroyed the Asuras and drank their blood; but the fury of Kali was such that her thirst for blood became unquenchable and She began manifesting her passion in cruel ways. Sage Narada rushed to Siva and implored Him to intervene in the matter and pacify Kali. Siva then came to the place in the dreadful form of *Sulapani*-the One armed with **Sula.** Kali promptly challenged the Lord to a contest in furious dance with her. She consented to be His slave if He won in the contest. It was then that Lord Siva began His Dance, witnessed by Brahma, Vishnu and other *Devas* and also Sage Munchikesa and Karkodaka. In the last item of dance called *Urthava Thandava*, when his ear ring slipped down, the Lord deftly caught it by His foot and wore it even while he continued to dance; Kali accepted defeat and Siva knowing that Kali was but an aspect of Parvathi, blessed her to be by His side; moreover He ordained that the devotees should first worship Kali and seek His blessings only afterwards. Munchikesa and Karkoda were also blessed to be always by His side. This marvellous *Tandavam* of the Lord is celebrated annually in the month of *Margali*, on the *Thiruvadirai* day. Saint Tirunavukkarasar has also immortalised the Dance of Kali in the following passage;

Kuutinaar umai tannootee kurripputai vetankontu
cuutinaar kankaiyaalai curaritu cataiyar poolum
paatinaar caama veetam paimpolir palanai meeyaar
aatinaar kaali kaana aalankaattu atikaalaaree

(Appar)

There are also many other *Puranas* which deal with this place. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, one of the Sixtythree famous Saivite Saints, (born at Karaikkal) gave up worldly pursuits, left her husband, emaciated herself in her tireless devotion to Siva and moved on her head to Mount Kailas to have His vision. Parvathi was astonished at the sight of this extraordinary devotee. When the Ammaiyar was asked by the Lord as to what she wanted, She replied that she desired only to witneess His Divine dance forever, seated at His feet. The Lord thereupon is said to have asked her to go to Tiruvalangadu to fulfil her wish. Naturally, we have the good fortune of worshipping Kariaikkal Ammaiyar also at Tiruvalangadu where her figure is seen beside Lord Siva.

Saint Tirugnanasambander has sung of this place connecting it with another place nearby-*Palaiyanur.* (*"Anjum Palaiyanur Alagadu"*). All the people in this village Palaiyanur are *Vellalas* or agriculturists. Long ago some seventy villagers of Palaiyanur are said to have burnt themselves at the stage to keep up their promise. The story goes that a certain Brahmin of Kanchipuram who suspected his wife of faithlessness, murdered her near Palaiyanur. She was haunting the vicinity of the village as a ghost called Neeli. The Brahmin was born as a merchant in his next birth and lived prosperously. Once he went to his father-in-law's house in order to take his wife home; but as the father-in-law did not send his daughter, he was coming alone to his place via Palaiyanur. Neeli, the ghost took the form of his present wife and approached him telling that her father had given his consent to accompany him; but he felt that there was some mischief afoot and ignored her. Neeli then approached the seventy Vellalas of Palaiyanur and pleaded that if she were allowed to spend a night with her husband in the village, she would live happily everafter with him. Moreover she managed to deprive the merchant of his charmed knife as well. The poor merchant tried his best to avoid staying with Neeli but the Vellalas prevailed upon him promising that they would sacrifice their lives if he would be harmed. The next morning the merchant was found dead, torn to pieces. All the Seventy Vellalas, infused with a sense of justice, kept their word. Palaiyanur is about a mile from Tiruvalangadu. The place where the seventy men sacrificeed their lives is now a tank midway between the two villages. All the pilgrims to Tiruvalangadu worship here too.

Many have expiated their sins in this holy place and become sanctified Kiradha, the hunter and Uridhrasamy were relieved their sins of murder by the

holy influence of the *ukthi Thirtha.* Somaswamy who led a life of dissipation is said to have attained *oksha* by fasting in this *Sthala* and having a dip in this holy *Thirtha.*

The three Saints celebrated for their holy hymns of *Thevaram* have all sung the praises of this place. Tirugnanasambander, on hearing the life of Karaikal Ammaiyar who moved on her head to this place, felt too humble to trample the dust of the holy place, went round the village and sang:

Ancum palaiyaṉuur aalaṅkaaṭṭem aṭikalaaree

(Companthar)

Sundaramurthi Nayanar and Karaikal Ammaiyar have also sung the glories of this place.

pattaa pattar palarpoorrum paramaa palaiyaṉuurmeeya
aattaa aalaṅkaṭaa uṉ aṭiyaark kaṭiyee aaveenee

(cuntarrar)

As for the temple, it is not very big. It has also within a shrine of Siddhi Vinayaka. In the Rathna Saba we see the majestic figure of Urdhava Thandava. In the *Moolasthana,* the figure of the Lord named "Devarsinga-Perumal" faces east. In the *Praharas* we find the *Sannidhis* of Agora Virabhadra, Karaikkalammaiyar and Vandar Kuzhali Amman. The Mukthi thirtha is in the western direction.

There are fifty two inscriptions to be found in the temple. Though they are not of any historical importance, they talk of many endowments made to the temple from time to time. Kulottunga III of the later Cholas who lived in the Thirteenth Century is said to have erected a *Mantap.* Vasta rajan also gave lands for the temple. Some inscriptions speak of festivals in honour of the famous Saints also, besides the presiding Deity.

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5. TIRUVOTRIYUR

In the north and the south of the city of Madras there are situated two *Sthalas* adding to the spiritual wealth of the city as much as the temples of Parthasarathy and Kapaliswara. It is Lord Thyagaraja found in both temples flanking the city on either side. Tiruvotriyur is four miles away from the city; it might have been a small place once not connected with the city; but today it is almost a suburb of the evergrowing Madras. There are long rows of big buildings on either side of the road leading to Tiruvotriyur and it is very difficult to trace the dividing line between the city and Tiruvotriyur. What with the growth of various industries, of population, the ceaseless flow of bus traffic from the Mint Bus Stand, the continuous chain of buildings etc.! Tiruvotriyur is now part and parcel of Madras. It is the fourth station in the Madras-Calcutta line and the temple is but a furlong away from the station.

This is one of the ancient temples of Tamil Nadu. Thyagesa is seen in a dancing pose but sitting unlike Nataraja. There is an old legend attributed to this place. During the period *Padmakalpa* there was a deluge and Brahma unable to stop it, did penance and sought the aid of Siva. The Lord manifested his universal form in the midst of *Yoga Agni* and 'withdrew' or 'absorbed' the deluge into himself. Hence the place name of 'Otriyur' ("Otru"; 'absorb'). The name also means a "mortgaged" place. ('Otri' mortgage). Another name for Tiruvotriyur is *Adipuri*. It is said that the big column of fire manifested by siva later turned into the temple. Thus the very temple is Siva embodied. All parts of this place are equally consecrated; all the tanks are *Thirthas*; the very sands are the holy ash or *Vibudhi*; all the groves abound with *Gananathar*; the place is a veritable Kailas of the South. Lord siva dances here to fulfil the wish of Nandi Deva. Numberless are the devotees who attained *Mukthi* here. Some of them are Vishnu, Brahma, Sage Romesa, Sage Vanmiki, Vasuki, Athisedan, Chandran, Lava (Rama's son) and Tondaiman. The Sthalapurana talks in detail of the worship of all the devotees.

Tyagesa is also traditionally called "Lord who knows the letters" (**"Ezhuthariyum Perumal"**). The story goes that Mandata, a King of *Suryavamsa*, lived to a ripe old age and did not die because of his *Punya*; however, he suffered from all the ailments of old age. He was told that death would come to him as a release if only he lessened his deeds of *Punya* dedicated to Siva. Longing to die, the King immediately ordered to reduce the royal endowments to all the temples. Lord Tyagesa is said to have understood the wording of his command and added therein: "Except for Tiruvotriyur". Thus the Lord came to be styled as *Ezhuthariyum Perumal.*

Another glory of this place is that it was the birth place of Kaliya Nayanar, one of the sixty-three Saivite Saints of Tamil Nadu. He was daily lighting a lamp of oil in the temple as a noble service to God; but he was so poor that one day he was not able to do even this service. He had no money for oil. Heartbroken at his inability to do the daily, self-imposed task to please the Lord, he began to cut his own throat. The Lord appeared before him and saved him and thus Kaliya Nayanar became a Saint.

It is also said that Lord Siva appeared here as the Divine bridegroom with Sakthi as His bride, to fulfil the wish of Sage Agasthiya. On the sixth day of Brahmotsa the Tirukkalyana festival takes place here annually. Moreover, Vasuki the serpent consecrated by Sage *Upamanyu* from whom the *Sivadiksha* was received, is said to have attained *Mukthi* here. Therefore the Lord is also worshipped in the form of the Serpent; hence the name "Padampakka Nathar" for the Lord. Elelasinga, another devotee of Tyagesa, was blessed with a precious gem (*Manickam*) by the Lord and so he is called *Manicka* Tyagar. Another important

event is connected with this place. Sundaramurthi Nayanar, one of the authors of the *Thevaram,* fell in love with *Sangili* of the Vellala family living here. Sundarar always looked upon Lord Siva Himself as his Friend. He prayed to Him to help him in winning the lady. Of course both loved each other because of their relationship in their past births. However, Sangili knew that her lover was already married to Paravai at Tiruvarur. Naturally she wanted Sundarar to take an oath of eternal love in the presence of Lord Siva. Sundarar begged his Friend to leave the *Moolasthanam* and rest in the shades of the *Mahila* tree (Sthalavirksha) in the temple for a while. The Lord agreed to do so at the time of the oath-taking; but being a cleverer Friend than Sundarar, He appeared in the dreams of Sangili and also let the cat out of the bag. He told her to insist upon taking the oath at the feet of the Mahila tree. Sangili accordingly prevailed upon Sundarar to take the oath in divine place and the fondlover, now made helpless, promised to live with her at Tiruvotriyur. Later when he tried to leave the place for meeting his first wife at Tiruvarur, he lost both his eyes; in course of time he recovered his sight; one eye was restored at Kanchipuram, the other at Tiruvarur. We come to know of all these details in Sekkizhar's *Periapuranam.* It is the Mahila tree that is still worshipped as the *Sthalavritcha* of this place.

It was only here that Sage Pattinathar attained *Mukthi.* He was born in a rich family; he later gave up every possession, became an ascetic and reached this place where he became one with the Lord. The Pattinathar temple, also called *Thavaraja Singham* is situated half a mile away from Tyagesa temple on the shore of the Sea.

The temple of Tyagesa was built during the Chola period. It has been recently renovated. The inscriptions speak of its glory in the Chola Age. In this big temple the *Linga* is *Prithvilinga* as in the temples of Kanchipuram and Tiruvarur. Tyagesa is found in a famous Sannidhi ajacent to this Moolasthana. The Sannadhi of Goddess Tirupurasundari is situated separately. The Goddess is also called *Vadivudai Nayagi* Many come regularly every Friday from Madras to worship the Goddess and Durgai Amman. The latter Sannadhi is found in the northern *Praharam* of the Garbagriha. Goddess Durgai is also called Vattappaarai Amman. This name is derived from the circular rock endowed with charms found near the Sannadhi. This is a very old temple. It is said that sacrifices were offered here until recently. A festival takes place for 18 days in the month of Chitrai in honour of Goddess Durgai.

The Moolavar faces east while the Goddess faces west. She is famed, since days of yore, for her unique powers. The daily puja performances are carried by the Namboodri bachelors of Kerala.

Tyagaraja is never taken in procession during day time. In the Brahmotsava taking place in the month of Masi, the fifth and the sixth days are most important. Every Friday is a festival day in this temple. All the usual festivals and the daily ceremonies of Saivite temples are to found here too. The Brahmotsava is the most famous of festivals. The Kavacha or the covering on the *Linga* is rarely removed; it is done thrice in the month of *Aippasi.*

The *Gowlisar* temple is found in the south prahara of the temple. This Deity was formerly called Padambakkanathar. The Vinayaka of the temple is called *Anukku Pillayar*. The figure in Yogic concentration here is worshipped as Dakshinamurthy. There are many *Lingas* here called *Ashtothra Linga, Sahashra Linga*, and *Tharalinga*, to suit the various ways of worship. The other smaller temples found inside are Arinjeswaram, Kambiswaram, Videlvidugiswaram etc. All the temples were built during the Chola period as they are connected with the surnames popular in the Chola period. Outside the temple, the Sankaracharya Mutt is situated in the east. Adhi sankara is said to have come here and quelled the wrath of Goddess Durgai (or Vattabalinachiyar); Her powers, now subjugated by Sankara, are said to have been pent up in a well, the mouth of which was closed by a rock. It is this place which is now called 'Vattapparai', (or the Round Rock). Besides, there are also temples of Kumaraswamy, Surya Deva and other devas found in the Tyagesa temple.

The important *Thirthas* of this place are *Nandi Thirtha* and *Brahma Thirtha.* The *Teppam* tank in the nothern side of temple is the Brahma Thirtha and Sea is also a *Thirtha.* Brahma Thirtha is also called Kasi Thirtha.

There are more than 200 inscriptions in the temple. One says that Kulottunga III came here in his 19th regnal year, stayed in the Rajarajan Mantap and witnessed the Ani festival. On the southern wall is an inscription which says that the temple was built at the time of Rajendra Chola (1012-42). Another tells us of a Vyakarna College that existed here; hence the name of the Deity: Vyakranathar. Some others give us information regarding the Chola administration. Many Chola Kings have made various endowments to the temple. The rulers of the Vijayanagar have also done many charitable deeds. Not only Kings and rulers but also many common citizens have enriched the temple with their charities from time to time.

The *Poojas* are done according to Agama rites. As the poojas are performed by Namboodris in the Amman Sannadhi, the rites differ from those of Agama in this Sannadhi. The Dyanaslokas in all temples of Tamil Nadu are almost the same. The Thevarams are recited. Sundarar sings of his plight when he is blind and fights shy of facing the womenfolk who will mock at him. This hymn is an internal evidence for his life history.

makattin pukkatoor cani enakkaanaay
maintanee maniyee manavaalaa
akattil pentukal naan onru co aal
alaiyeel poo kurutaa enattariyeen
mukattin kan ilantu ennanam vaalveen (Sundavar)

Here we find Sundarar taking the liberties of a friend with God and findings fault with Him for forcing his friend to take the oath of love in the shades of *Mahila* tree; In all the *Thevaram* hymns of his, we find Sundarar claiming the intimate familiarity of a friend with God. Besides, his hymns serve as an invaluable source of information to trace the events in his own life. We shall refer to them in relevant places.

From the humble camphor offering to the big festivals, all kinds of worship are offered to the Deity. There are prescribed sums for all kinds of worship.

As for facilities for stay, we have many choultries around the tank. However, as the place is adjacent to Madras, not many choose to stay in the place and they find it convenient to come on a short visit and return to Madras. Many choultries put on a gay appearance during seasons of marriage. Many in Madras city choose to celebrate the marriages and other functions here, just because of space problem in the City. There are no good hotels here; nor is there any need for them.

Moreover, many come from Madras to buy cows that are sold in large numbers in the cattle fairs of Tiruvotriyur. It is also developing in industries. Perhaps it may be annexed with Madras soon.

6. TIRUVANMIYUR

This is another *Sthala* dedicated to Tyagaraja in the south of Madras. This is situated outside the City limits. Only recently many buildings have sprung up on either side of the road leading to this place from Madras. This is just 1½ miles from Madras City limits. We can reach this place from Adayar by bus. It can also be reached by bus plying in the Madras—Palagai Varavathi-route. The place is very small, adjacent to the Sea. The temple is two furlongs away from the shore. The *Linga* is white as milk; it is named Maruthiswarar and Amritiswarar. It is a *Swayambu Murthi* of self-manifestation. The Goddess is named Chockanayaki and Tirupurasundari,

Just as we find Pattinathar's *Samadhi* at Tiruvotriyur, we find the Samadhi of Pamban Kumara Gurudasa Swamigal here who recently attained *Mukthi*. The temple is again as old as the Chola period. The inscriptions speak of the many visits of Rajendra I (1012-1044) to this temple to worship Tyagesa or Tyagaraja. The Garbagriha is built in the typical Chola style. There is a traditional story that Vanmiki, the author of the Ramayana in Sanskrit attained *Mukthi* here, after worshipping Lord Tyagaraja. Vanmiki who longed to give up the mortal coils approached Sage Markandeya who told him of the glories of Siva and asked to go round the World. Vanmiki was told that he must worship Siva in the place where he hears the *Asariri* (or the voice of the Invisible) "I am here". Thus Vanmiki is said to have heard the words in this place during the course of his wanderings, he worshipped Siva here and then attained *Mukthi*; hence the place—name *Vanmiyoor*. Siva granted his boon that the place should be called after his *Bhaktha*. The day of his boon was the full moon day in the month of Panguni. On this day every year, the Eighteen dance recitals of Tyagesa are celebrated. In the west street there is also a temple of Vanmiki. In the temple we find the Utsavamurthi of Vanmiki also. The Divine Dance of Siva is said to be enjoyed by Vanmiki. In olden days this was celebrated in the shades of a *Vanni Tree*.

The *Sthalavritcha* is *Vanni*. There are many *Vilva* trees around the temple. The Devas worshipped *Amirta* (The Drink that confers immortality) in the form of Linga; hence name *Marunthisar*. Besides, the Lord is said to have derived the name from having blessed Sage Agasthya with a knowledge of all herbs and plants for medical purposes. Agasthya is said to have had the vision of Siva and Parvathi in *Kalyana Kola* (in Marriage) here. He is also called *Palvanna Nathar*; this name is derived from the *Purana* that Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow cursed by Sage Vasishta was relieved of her sins by dripping milk on the Linga hidden in a dense growth of heather. The Linga naturally looks milk-white. As the divine cow was dripping milk on the Linga, a lion came in the form of another cow to attack Kamadhenu. When the latter fought with the Lion in disguise, its hoofs are said to have struck at the Linga and the scars of the smitten Linga are said to be found even today. Yama the God of Death who defied Siva and Markandeya at Tirukkadavur, came here to worship Tyagaraja to be relieved of the burden of his sins. Just to enable the Sun God to worship the God, in the evening, the *Sannadhi* is said to face the west. (It must be remembered that almost all *Moolasthanas* in Tamil Nadu-in temples-face the east). Rama, separated from Sita, is said to have worshipped Tyagaraja here, while on his wanderings. *Bringhi Maharishi* also was relieved of his sins by worshipping the Lord here. It is said that Parangimalai (St. Thomas Mount) was the mountain on which the Sage dwelt and worshipped Tyagaraja.

Though both the place and the temple are small, the Sthalapurana shows that it is one of the most important resorts of Lord Siva. There is a *Purana* that Brahma himself erected the temple and worshipped Siva here. The *Thirtha* is also named after Brahma. Thereafter *Sadyoo* a King who lived at Saidapet is set to have built the temple and erected the tower and celebrated festivals. The temple, as it stands today, was built by the Cholas in the Eleventh Century. It is shaped in *Gaja Brishta Akriti*. Certain parts of the temple were damaged at the time of Tippu Sultan. In the beginning of this century the temple was renovated and *Kumbabishekam* was conducted. Though the Moolasthana Sannadhi faces west, the Rajagopura faces east. However, the *Gopura* is incomplete. The first deity we see is Lord Muruga in the temple as we enter the Rajogapura. On the right is Vinayaka; on our right the Amman Sannadhi is found; the Natana mantap of Tyagaraja is found adjacent to the Vinayaka Sannadhi. The Natana mantap leads to the inner *Praharas* of the temple. The figure of God is inclined to the north a little. In the big mantap of the Swami, we find the figures of Vinayaka, Muruga and Nataraja. In the northern prahara we find Sandeswara and the sixtythree Nayanmars. Also we find the figure of Appaiya Dikshithar who is said to have stayed at the adjacent *VelaCheri* and worshipped the Lord. His figure is itself identified with that of Chandeswara by some devotess. There are 108 lingas and the idol of *Byrava* also.

The Brahmathirtha is perhaps the tank in the east of the temple. Sage Vanmiki is said to have caused the origin of five thirthas called Janmanasani, Kamanasani, Papanasani, Gnanadayini and Mokshadayini; These resulted from the five drops let off from his locks of hair. The purana says that Rakshasu who lived as a monkey, attained the figure of a girl by dipping in the holy Kalyanathirtha in Brahmaloka. Thereafter she gave birth to Vali and Sugriva famed in the Ramayana. Then she is said to have dipped in *Janmanasani* and was restored to the original figure. Krishna is said to have received *Sivadiksha* from Sage Upamanyu and was relieved of his sins by a dip in the *Papanasani*. Chandra dipped in the Kamanasani to get relieved of his sin that attached to him when he longed for **his Guru's wife**. Tirugnana Sambandar and Tirunavukkarasar have sung the glories of the sthala in their hymns:

maṉculaaviya maatamatir poli maalikai
cencolaalarkal taam payilum tiruyaaṉmiyuur

(Campantar)

entai yiicaṉ eṉ reettita vallireel
vantu niṉṟitum vaaṉmiyuur iicaṉee

(Appar-3)

The *Tiruvadirai* day in Margali and *Uttiram* day in Panguni are the most important days to worship Tyagaraja. Besides, every full moon day is also sacred to the Lord. The Brahmotsava takes place in the month of Panguni.

There are many beautiful sculptures of of the early Chola period in the Garbagriha of the temple. Durbhessil the French writer has also referred to them. Most of the figures look legendary, with half the face carved as the lion's face and the other half human. There are seven inscriptions found in the temple. They range from 1017 to 1061 A.D., belonging to the periods of Rajendra I, his son Rajadhi raja, and his brother-Rajendra II. We understand from them that this place was in *Puliyoorkottam*, belonging to the Jayankonda Chola mandala of Tondai Nadu. (**Mandala** : Province. **Kottam** : District) The Lord is called Mahadevar of Tiruvanmiyoor. Many endowments of lands and gifts of cattle are also mentioned in the inscriptions, to facilitate lighting lamps. Many charities are referred to, for conducting poojas regularly and ensuring the supply of flowers and garlands. Adisaivas or ancient Saivites were the priests of the temple.

Though the place is a small village today, it shows signs of development because of its nearness to the city of Madras. There are no facilities for stay here. No pilgrims stay in the very few choultries; nor are there good hotels. Being so near to Madras, perhaps there is no need for stay at Thiruvanmiyoor. Now many townships are comming up and it is growing as a part of the city.

7. TIRUKALUKKUNDRAM

PAKSHI THEERTHAM

This is situated forty-five miles to the South of Madras and 9 miles to the south east of Chingleput Railway Station. The Northerners know this place by its familiar name of *Patchi Thirtha.* Two kites come here daily at 11 A. M. to the Hill and return after having been fed. The inscriptions refer to this place as "*Ulakalanda Cholapuram*". The temple on the hill is one of the oldest. Of all the rock temples, that which is found a top hill is considered to be the oldest in Tamil Nadu. The place looks a small town. Some other Sanskrit names for the place are Vedapuri, Dakshina Kailasam and Rudrakoti.

The Hill is 500 feet high and Lord Vedapuriswara dwells on the top. The very hill is said to be the four Vedas; the peak is said to symbolise Atharvana Vada on which the temple is found. Thus the hill is termed Vedagiri. At the foot of the hill there is a big Siva temple of Bakthavathsala, adjoining which are found Sankuthirtha and the Sannadhi of Rudrakotiswara. The inscriptions in the temple of the Goddess also show that they are as old as the temple on the hill.

The Sankuthirtha is said to fetch in a valampuri conch once in every twelve years. The hill being holy is worshipped and the pilgraims go round it. The circumference is about 2½ miles. All bodily ailments disappear if any affected person chooses to stay in this place, take a holy bath in the Sankuthirtha before sunrise and go round the hill with devotion. The hill abounds with various kinds of herbs of medicinal value. Those bound for Mahabalipuram never fail to visit this place. Hundreds throng every day to witness the birds at 11 A. M. feeding from the hands of Desikar. There are many buses which take us to Chingleput from Madras. Those who go to Mahabalipuram from Chingleput by bus will pass through this town. There are many buses from Kanchipuram also to this place. The State Government also has facilitated the tourists and pilgrims by running special buses on Sundays to this place and Mahabalipuram.

There are many choultries though no good hotels. Many foreigners too don't fail to pay a visit to this place.

The Hill as we have seen is divided into four parts standing for the four Vedas—Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana. The temple at the top of the hill is the temple of Iswara praised by Tirunavukkarasar of the Seventh Century,

The temple is built of three rocks; and the walls too are rocks. There are many figures carved on them. Perhaps this belongs to the time of Narasimha Pallava (7th Century A. D.). Many of the figures are like those at Mahabalipuram in style. Skandasishya of the Seventh Century refers to the Moolasthana and the endowments made for its upkeep. Perhaps he refers to this temple or it may be the one, now ruined and uncared for, lying near this temple. Of all the rock-cut temples of Tamil Nadu, this is the oldest. Another temple cut of a single rock (Monolythic cave) is found some 50 feet down the flight of steps in the east. The measurements of this temple are as follows:

Breadth of the cave	— 21' 6½"
Depth of the back wall of the cell	— 26' 2"
„ to the entrance of the cell	— 17' 4"
„ to the figures of Brahma and Vishnu	— 18' 6"
Height of the cave — —	— 8' 5½'

This temple cut of a monolythic was once perhaps a place of worship where Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were held sacred. Today there is only a Linga found, uncared for. There are separate flights of steps to go up or to descend from this hill. The pilgrims who see this Linga in Monolythic cave bow before it even today, though no pujas are offered.

In the temple at the top of the hill, the Linga is facing east; it is a Swayambu; it is protected by a Kavacha. At the foot of the Linga is the figure of Markandeya. On the Northern wall, figure of Yoga-Dakshinamurthi is found. There are also other figures like those of Brahma, Vishnu, Nandhi, Sandeswar. Somaskandar, Boga Sakthi etc. The sannadhi of Goddess-Chockammal is in the inner *Prahara* facing north. *Sthalavritcha* is the *Plantain Tree.*

The place name is traced to the fact that two birds come here regularly since time immemorial. Of course there is *Puranic* legend ascribed to them. The eight sons born of Brahma's mind (*Manasika Putras*) did a great penance to obtain *Saaroopa Padavi* from Siva. But they desired Saayujya when Iswara appeared before them. They were cursed by Siva to become kites because of the blunder committed in desiring the boon. When they prayed to Him for mercy, Siva is said to have told that they would be relieved of their sins if they were born as kites, two by two in each Yuga and worshipped Vedagiri.

Thus the three yugas passed; In the Kaliyuga, the sages, *Busha* and *Vidhatha* by name, are said to worship the Holy Hill in the guise of birds. There are also many other stories with reference to the birds. However, it is true that two kites come flying here regularly at 11 A. M. every day and feed at the hands of a Desikar. They are fed with Sarkarai Pongal (Jaggery bath) and ghee. The story goes that they bathe in the Genges in the morning, take their food at Tirukalukundram at noon, worship Iswara at Rameswaram in the evening and reach Chidambaram at nightfall. Thus the place associated with the kites in the legends is naturally called *Kazhukunram* or *Patchithirtham.*

The name *Vedagiri* is also said to be a causal term. The four Vedas were damaged by Brahma and and others so insufferably that they complained to Siva of their sorry plight; they told how they were set aside. Siva then ordained that the Vedas should take the form of four rocks inseparable from earth and He himself chose to reside upon them. Thus the Vedas appeared as the Hill with its four parts named after the Vedas.

At the Kailas, Nandi persecuted Garuda for having talked ill of Siva. Though Siva Himself intervened in the affair to defend Garuda, Nandi would not be softened. Then Siva cursed Nandi to reach the earth and promised him salvation if he worshipped Him at Rudragiri. Nandi had to pass through many ordeals set by Siva Himself to test the strength of his devotion. Nandi thereupon prayed the Lord to bless all those who might come here and dip in the *Thirtha.*

There is another *Purana* which accounts for its name *Rudrakoti.* The Devas, persecuted by the Asuras at the time of the churning of the Ocean of Milk, implored Siva to help them. Siva sent his troops of Rudras (or Attendants) and desrtoyed the Asuras. The Rudras who had murdered so many of the Asuras are said to have come here and raised a temple to Siva on the banks of the Sanku Thirtha and worshipped Him. The temple is still called *Rudra Moksham.*

Indira is also said to have worshipped the Lord here. Once every twelve years, it is said that Indira worships the Lord by sending a thunder to this Hill. It is believed that the temple is struck by lightning once in every 12 years accordingly. Similarly there appears a *Valampuri* conch in the Sanku Thirtha once in every 12 years. Lord Vishnu prayed the Lord on behalf of Brighu and the *Eight Vasus* also prayed and the Deity here on behalf of Kamadhenu.

The big temple is at the foot of the hill. There are beautiful towers around it. The Garbagriha is of *Gajabrashta Akrithi.* The Sannadhi of the Goddess has been renovated. The Lord is Bakthavathsalan and the Goddess Tirupurasundari. To differentiate it from the rock temple, it is called "*Taazha Koil*" (Temple below). Saint Manickavasagar had the vision of God here. There is also a temple dedicated to the saint besides one for the Holy Feet of Iswara. Some inscriptions in a room of the temple reveal that the temple was built by Skanda Sishya, a Pallava ruler and renovated by Narasinga Varma who conquered Vadapi. Thus this temple is as old as the rock temple above. Perhaps this was first built of bricks. The inscriptions refer to the works of renovation carried out by Rajakesari Varma, Adittaya I and the existence of the Sannadhi for the Amman (Goddess) even before the time of Sundara Pandya (1259). Later Suryadeva and others continued the work of renovation.

The brahmotsava takes place here for ten days in Chitrai round about the full moon day. On the fifth day, during the Adikara Nandi festival, the idol is taken round the hill in procession. This is the most famous festival for the Lord. As for the Goddess, the feet of the idol is every day worshipped with an offering of water. The abisheka for the whole idol is done only on three occasions: the eleventh day of Aadi puram, the ninth day of Navarathri and Panguni Uttiram day. Aadi puram is the most important-festival to the Goddoess. Other festivals also take place in the temples of Rudrakotiswaram and Markandeswaram. In was also said that there was a Vishnu temple here.

The Sankuthirtha is the holiest of all thirthas. Many flock to this Thirtha in staunch faith to have a dip in order to be relieved of their ailments. It is said that the water is rich in copper content. As for the conch that appears there, the story goes that Markandeya came to the tank and wondered what to do as there

was no vessel to be found anywhere near. He had just them returned from Kasi (Varanasi); Then there was a conch which appeared in the water which was blowing loudly. The people say that even today there is a loud blowing noise heard for a week prior to the appearance of a conch in the tank. Besides, there are also other Thirthas; Viswamitra tirtha, Kodivinayaga tirtha, Meygana tirtha and Agsthya tirtha.

Many Dutch travellers have come to this place in the past. The 1908-1909 publication of the Madras-inscription research talks of 23 Dutch men who came to this place and of their signatures. Their writings are in-Roman script found in the monolythic mantap today. Their visits range from 1664 to 1687 A.D. The Dutch Governor at Pulicot, Antony Parilion came to Sadras, some 9 miles away from Tirukalukunram, which belonged to the Dutch then. He too had come to this temple. Though away from the seashore by 8 miles, the hill was seen at a long distance in the Sea and no wonder many foreigners have come to this place.

There are many inscriptions in the temple on the Hill and the other at the foot. They are said to be 51 in number. The Madras Archaeological Department-published them in 1894, 1910 and 1911. There are some inscriptions in English and Roman script also. Some belong to the 7th centnry. The oldest ones are in Tamil. They belong to the different periods of Pallavas, Cholas, Pandayas, Rashtrakutas and Vijayanagar Rulers. Many charities are mentioned for presentation of jewels and erection of mantaps. One of them speaks of charities to enable Naminandi Adigal to purchase lands for the Mutt. Some date back to fifth century also (Skanna Vishnu) Thus we find the old and the new mingled here among the inscriptions. There are no frescoes worth mentioning in the temple. The Sculptures carved on the rock walls are indeed beautiful.

St. Manickavasagar and the three Saints of Thevaram have praised the glories of this temple. They are all steeped in religious fervour and popular even to this day.

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8. TIRUVALLUR

This important *Vaishnavat* sthala is situated in Chingleput District on the Madras-Arkonam Railway Section. The place is situated at a distance of two miles from the station Tiruvallur which can be reached by bus. There are many bus routes to this place from Madras, Chinglepnt and Kancheepuram. It is known by the Sanskrit names of-"*Kingriha Kshetra*", *Punyavartha Kshetra*" and "*Velksha-Aranya-Kshetra*". Tirumangai Alwar always refers to the place as *Evvul*. His *Pasuras* are very moving; and one of them is as follows:

munnoor tuutu vaanarattin vaayil molintu, arakka
mannuur tannai vaaliyinaal maala munintu, avanee
pinnoor tuutu aatimannarkuaki perunilattaar
innaar tuutan ana ninraaan evvul kitan taanee

(tirumankai)

Though a famous Vaishnavate centre, there is also found here an old Siva temple. It is not mentioned in the *Thevaram*; it still continues to be worshipped. It is found on the banks of a very big tank which is said to have belonged to it in past; today it belongs to the Vishnu temple.

The Lord is Veeraraghava Perumal and the Goddess Vasumati *Nacchiyar* or Kanakavalli *Thaayar.* The Lord is seen reclining on the *Adi Sesha.* The posture is called *Bujanga Sayanam*; hence the name of the Deity: *Bujanga Sayana.* *Saligotra Maharishi* worshipped the Lord here and moved by his deep penance, Lord Vishnu appeared before him and asked him where to rest. Hence another name for the place: *Tiru-Evvul.* The *Vimana* is *Vijayakoti Vimana.* The Sannathi faces east.

The *Tirtha* called *Hridh Tapa Nasiui* is one of the most sacred *Tirthas* of Vaishnava *Sthalas.* The name means that it helps remove the sins of the heart. On the new moon day every month hundreds of people take a dip in the holy *Tirtha* and worship the Lord. The new moon day of the monih of *Tai* is most important. Many festivals take place every month. Tirumazisai and Tirumangai Alwars have dedicated some of their hymns to the Lord: The spiritual glories of the place have been beautifully described in the *Sinkrahesa Stuti,* a sloka composed by Sri *Nikamanta Mahadesika* and the *Andati* of the 108 *Tirupathis* (holy places) composed by *Divyakavi-Pillai Perumal Iyengar.*

Adivasi satagopa Yatindra Mahadesika, the first title-holder of Ahobila mutt, (*Sri AlakiaSingar*) took efforts to build the steps on all the four sides of the *Tirthas.* Many religious heads of the famous Vaishnava Mutt who succeeded him have done many works of renovation in the temple and endowed many ornaments and jewels to the Deity. The temple is run by the *Mutt.* '*Ahobila*' has been rendered in Tamil as "*Singa Vezh Kunram*" and Tirumangai Alwar sings the glory of the *Kunram.*

There are a few inscriptions to be found in the temple. One of them speak, of the gift of a land to the temple by one Tiruvenkada Deva (belonging to the time of Kulottuna Chola) to meet the expenses of the *Mahara Sankramana.* Another belonging to 1552 Saka Year speaks of *Sri Veeraragava Satagopa Jeer Swamigal,* the 13th title-holder of the *Mutt* who arranged for a festival; the expenses were to be managed with the interest accruing from 133 pieces of gold. Yet another refers to one Alagappa Chetti (1542 *Saka*) who gifted lands to the temple and raised a big *antap* as well. The other inscriptions date back to the

Rajas of Vijayanagar like Venravekata Raya, Sadasiva Raya and Ramadeva Maharaya who made many eudowments of lands and villages to the temple. There are also a few inscriptions which are not distinct.

There are some choultires in the town for stay.

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9. KADANMALLAI (MAHABALIPURAM)

The port that flourished during the time of Pallavas is known as Kadanmallai in literature, Mamallapuram in history and Mahabalipuram to-day. This place was at the peak of glory at the time of Narasimha Pallava of Seventh Century who was the most famous of Pallava rulers. Naturally it came to be called after one of his titles "*Mamallan*". We do not know what exactly was the name of this place before his time; but there is nothing wrong in assuming that its name was Kadanmallai in olden times. Tirumangai Alwar also refers to this place by the same name; he also says that it was a port busy with vessels; thus it must have been a popular port in olden days. It seems to have been a port during the Pallava period. However, there is a lighthouse today only to warn ships off the shore for no ships can ever reach the shallow waters of Kadanmallai today. We find also a very old lighthouse no longer used today. It is said that large portions of the place have been destroyed by the sea. Thus the old port disappeared and the bed of the Ocean was filled with rocks, which are nothing but hidden dangers to the ships today.

This is a small village today, 35 miles to the south of Madras. There is a special bus run by the Government Transport on Sundays to this place; besides there are many other bus services to this place from Madras. To the south of this place is Sadras, at a distance of 10 miles. Once this city seived for a strong fortress for the Dutch. It was from Sadras they came often to Mamallapuram and Tirukalukunram. The Dutch, the English and other foreigners popularised the name of "*Seven Pagodas*". Even today to many foreigners the name Mahabalipuram sounds strange; but "Seven Pagodas" is familiar. This place must have been built between the second and fifth centuries A.D.

Kancheepuram was the capital of the Cholas (fifth century) even before the Pallava period. Elanthirayan, the Chola Prince, who sailed from Manipallava, an island off Ceylon, had Kanchi as his capital. As he was sailing in the ship, it was wrecked on the high seas and he reached the shore by swimming and came to Konchi. The shore which he reached by swimming was perhaps named *Kadanmallai* and he might have developed it into a big port. It flourished so till the seventh and eighth centuries. Thereafter the sea might have swept on the lands and many parts might have been swept off. Some are of the opinion that there were originally seven rock-hewn temples at Kadanmallai of which five were swept off and only two remain to be seen today. This appears to be true. In fact the

temple on the shore today also looks pathetic, while the waves of the sea beat ceaselessly round it. Sri Jagadisa Iyer says that the temples might have gone into the sea only after the time of Sekkilar (1070-1117 A.D)

There are temples on the shore and in the village. The shore-temple is a Siva temple for which no poojas are offered. This was built in the Seventh Century. Some say that this temple is the oldest of all in Tamil Nadu and the other temples were built only afterwards. It might be true. In Tamil Nadu all temples were till then built or bricks. It is only during the Pallava period that hills were cut out, rocks were caved in and monoliths were heaped in artistic shapes. An inscription says that the temple was called "Kshatriya Simha Pallaveswaram". There are 17 streaks of ash for the Linga in the temple. Behind it we find the carved figure Somaskanda. Behind this temple we find the temple of Somaskanda named "Rajasimha Pallaveswaram". Perhaps this was built at the time of Rajasimma Pallava (690-710). The other rock-cut chariots are also perhaps temples where the Linga was worshipped. The so- called Gauesa-Ratha is said to have enshrined a Linga which was taken abroad to England. Later Vinayaka was worshipped there. Today the place is a famous Vaishnava Sthala.

Of the twelve Alwars, Budaththalwar was born here; hence its sanctity for Vaishnavites. The Vishnu temple is called "*Thala Sayanam*". The temple on the shore was called "*Jala Sayanam*". The God is named Thalasayana Perumal. The Goddess is Nilamangai Thayar. It is mother Earth who appears as the Goddess. The Vimana of the temple is of *Sukanakruti* type. The thirtha is *Garudanathi*. The most important of the puranas ascribed to this place speaks of how Sage *Pundarika* was blessed with the divine vision of the Lord Tirumangai Alwar has devoted two *Pathikams* to this place. Buthathalwar also has a reference to it. Tirumangai Alwar sings of the unique glory of the union of the two Gods, Siva and Vishnu here.

The figure of Somaskanda is carved in many cave temples. Yet this is famous as a Vaishnava Sthala. Lord Vishnu revealed Himself before Pundarika in this holy place. It is said that the sage derived his name from having offered all the lotus flowers (Pundarika = Lotus) to Vishnu. Led by a crocodile, he reached "Thalasayana". He wanted to garland Lord Vishn at *Tiruparkadal* - the Ocean of Milk; he did not know what to do; he was restless; he thought of drying the sea to reach Tiruparkadal. A year passed and the lotus flowers he kept on the shore remained as fresh as ever; The waters too never got exhausted. However, Lord Vishnu yielding to his love and faith, and in the disguise of an old ascetic appeared before the Sage. He tried to dissuade the sage from his effort but in vain. Then the Lord told him that he was hungry and requested him to bring him food and he agreed to do the work for his sake. The sage took the food acconingly from Mamallapuram and reached the shore; but the old ascetic was not found there. Lord Vishnu Himself

was seen lying down on the sands. The sage rushed to the Lord in ecstasy and garlanded Him. Thus Lord Vishnu is seen there since then lying on the barred floor; hence *'Thalasayana'*. There is also a *Tirtha* called afted the sage–Pundarika thirtha. This thirtha is said to be more holy than the Ganges. Agasthya, Garuda and a host of others have earned salvation by dipping in this *Thirtha.* The place is also glorified in the *Puranas* as one ruled by a King who had visited *Indra Loka* or the land of Indra.

This place today is an important tourist attraction, where the spiritual, artistic and cultural aspirations of man blend harmoniously. Quite a large number of foreigners visit this place to witness the glory of Pallava architecture. The monolithic *Rathas* are excellent specimens of Pallava art. The shore temples have some of the finest pieces of sculptures in Tamil Nadu. The realism and fine sense of proportion revealed in the carved figure of the gigantic elephant and other figures are indeed remarkable. There are five monolithic temples separately situated. As they resemble chariots, they are called *Rathas*: being five in number, they are associated with the Pandavas; hence their name *Pancha Pandavar Rathas.* All of them are Siva temples. Besides, we have other cave temples at the foot of the hill and in its midst. There is also a Varaha Mantapa named after Varaha avatar of Lord Vishnu. In some of the cave temples and on the rocks too many scenes from the *Puranas* and other legends are carved. The best of them is the scene of Arjuna's penance. We also find the scene of Lord Krishna lifting the Goverdhana Hill above. Thus there are many scenes which can easily be traced in the *Puranas* in addition to some others which cannot be explained. All the carvings belong to the periods of Mahendra Pallava and Narasinha Pallava of the Seventh Century, A. D. The shore temple was perhas built at a later time. Some say that it was built by Rajasimha Pallava. Of course all the carvings bear the mark of Narasimha Pallava and there is no doubt that most of them belong to his time. However, there were no rock-temples built in his time by heaping stone upon stone; consequently it is concluded that the shore temple was erected by Rajasimha who came after Narasimha.

Here too are some inscriptions which date back to the Chola and the Pallava periods. They are carved on the walls of the temples and mantapas and on the rocks. A few of them are indistinct; generally they are a good source of historical material giving information regarding the builders of the temples and certain endowments.

There were a few choultries here in olden times. Today the State Government is building very confortable lodgings to facilitate all, especially the foreigners. There are no good hotels and the pilgrims and tourists will have to make their own arrangements for food. Now some hotels are Comming up.

The Pallavas have left an imperishable record in the field of architecture and stone architecture in the Tamil land begins with them. Thus Kadanmallai or Mahabalipuram is an unique glory of Tamil Nadu. It must be remembered that there is a no connection between this place and King Mahabali, (Tiruvikrama avatar of Lord Vishnu) as the name of the place seems to indicate.

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10. KANCHEEPURAM—SIVA TEMPLES—EKAMBAM

Kancheepuram, the Golden City, is well known as one of the seven *Sthalas* or important places of pilgrimage. Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kasi (Varanasi), Kanchi, Avanthi and Dwaraka are the seven places (Sabtha Stalas) which continue to be the holiest for all Hindus since very early times. Some of them are Saivite centres; some others are Vaishnavite. Kancheepuram is uuique among them for it is both a Vaishnavite and a Saivite *Punyasthala*. Moreover, Buddism and Jainism too flourished here in the past. It is essentially a city of temples; and shrines and tirthas meet our eye wherever we turn in the City. It is also historically important, for it has been the capital successively of the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Rulers of Vijiaynagar. It is known by various names such as Kacchi, Kacchi Ekambam, Sivapuri, Kacchipedu, Kancheepuram etc. It is in Chingleput District on the Chingleput-Arkonam line. As it was once a capital, there are many good roads leading to this city from-various parts of the land. It is forty five miles south-west of Madras. The Madras-Bangalore trunk road runs adjacent to the City. In the midst of the city is the *Pallavar Medu* which connects the city with the Pallava rule in the past. It is said to have many caves and ruined towers and palaces,-the relics of the past. The Pallava rulers had been going to Mahabalipuram their important port as often as possible from Kancheepuram, their capital. Consequently we find-*Mantapas* and choultries on either side of the roads leading from here to Mahabalipuram. Most of them are in ruins-today and even in the city there are many ruins of temples and mantapas which remind us of a glory that is past.

Kancheepuram is traditionally divided into two parts-the Big and the Small or Sivakanchi and Vishnu Kanchi respectively. Siva Kanchi is dedicated to-Ekambaranathar and Vishnu Kanchi to Vardaraja Perumal. Moreover, there is said to be a third part of the city-the Western-known as the Jaina Kanchi, where we find a big Jain Shrine. Many Jains from various parts of the country come to this place for worship. Today this-Western part is outside the municipal limits, west of the river, *Vegavadhi*.

Kancheepuram is a *Prithvi Sthala.* The Linga is of the earth; hence the name. Many Nayanars have sung of this place. They have mentioned five *Sthalas* other then the sthala of Ekambaranathar. They are *Kacchi Maayanam, Kacchi. Merrali, Tiruvonakandanthali, Kacchi Anehadhangavatham* and *Kacci Nerikkar-aikalu.* Of the five the first is situated in the Ekambaranathar temple itself. The rest are separately situated outside the temple.

Tirukacchi Ekambam : This is the most important of the *Sthalas* worshipped by Nayanars. The terms 'Kacchi' is only the other form of 'Kanchi'. *Ekambaram* means the single mango tree. The holy Mango tree is the *Sthalavritcha.* This tree is having four big branches spreading in the four directions and they yield fruits of four distinct shapes-and tastes and those who have the good fortune to eat the fruit will be blessed with noble descendants. The *Sthalpurana* continues that the four branches also stand for the four Vedas. At the foot of the tree Ekambaranather is found in the manifestaiion of Somaskandha. Tirugnanasambandar has devoted four hynms to Lord Ekambarar, Tirunavukkarasar seven and Sundarar one. As we have already seen Sundarar who failed to keep his promise to Siva lost both his eyes at Tiruvortiyar, it was to this place he came afterwards and he appealed to God's boundless merey in his *Pathika.* This being a *Saktihsthala,* his sight was restored so far as the left eye was concerned. (It must be remembered in this connection that Goddess Sakthi is represented on the leftern side of Lord Ardhanariswara).

The Purana says that Uma Devi playfully covered the eyes of Lord Siva at Kailas once; the eyes of Siva are the Sun and the Moon. Naturally the world was immersed in total darkness. Men and Devas failed in their duties and obeisance to the Lord. There was chaos everywhere. Though it meant but a few seconds or minutes to Goddess Parvathi, *Yugas* passed by for men and Devas in total absence of light. Though the Goddess was free from any motive to sin, Lord Siva ordained Her to go to Kanchi and worship Him, after completing the prescribed dharmas which are 32 in number. Thus She was to seek expiation. Parvathi accordingly stayed in *Pilakasam,* the cave of a serpent at Kamakottam. The serpent worshipped Parvathi and begged her to stay there; the Goddess lived at *Pilakasam* accordingly and prayed to Lord Siva for His mercy doing the prescribed deeds of charity. To make mankind understand Parvathi's strength of will and relentless devotion to Siva, He bade the heavenly river *Kampa* to flow in spate on earth. As the over whelming floods of the river were flowing fast, Parvathi was alarmed and held the Deity in tight embrace to protect Her Lord from being damaged by the floods. The Devas in Heaven were awe struck at Her devotion. The scars left by the bracelets and the breasts of Parvathi during the divine union are left on the Deity. So runs the Purana regarding Ekambaranathar. Sundarar has immortalised the incident in the following verse;

vellāṅ kaaṭṭi veruṭṭiṭa anci
verūvi ootit taluva velippaṭṭa
kallak kampanai eṅkal piraanaik
kaanak kaṇ aṭiyeen perravaaree

(Cuntarar-10)

The temple is situated in an area of thirty acres. There are five *Prakaras* including the *ada vilaham.* The four walls are stone walls. The main tower is the South Tower with nine gateways. This was built by Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagar. In the south Sannadhi Street we find the four pillars and the Sixteen pillara *Mantapss.* The imposing figures of Shanmuga and Vinayaka are seen to the right and left respectively of the South tower. There is a tank inside the temple which is the tirtha of the place, it is called *Kampaa Nadhi.* By its side we fined the thousand pillar *antap.* To the north of the *Mantap* there is the Palli tower or the Tower of the Pallavas. On the right and left sides of the entrance to this tower we find the figures of Vikata chakra Vinayaka and Arumugha Kumara. In the *Garbagriha* we find Kacchi Ekambar in the form of *Prithvi Linga.* In the first *Prahara* there are various deities like Vinayaka, the Saivite Saints, Agasthya, Sandanachariar and Sekkilar. In the Southern direction of the *Garbagriha* we find the figure of *Vella Kambar* (the Kamba of the floods) said to have been worshipped by Brahma. In the west *Prahara* we find Santhana Ganapathi, Sowbagya Ganapathi, the Linga with 108 miniature *Lingas* carved on it, Panatharesar Shanmuga and Moksha Linga. In the north Prahara, there are found the *Utsava Idols* of Markandeya, Kalla Kambar, Mattala Madavesar, the Sixtythree Nayanars, Arumugha Kumarar and Bikshadavar. In the east *Prahara* the Nilatthunda Perumal Sannadhi is situated facing west. The Utsava idols of Samayacharya are in the second Prahara; Besides, we find Nilakanda Sivacharya and Nataraja also. The holy mango tree, the *Sthalavritcha* is found behind the figure of Ekambar. Somaskanda, Mavadi Kanda and Elavaar Kuzhaliammai are found on the two sides of Ekambar. On the leftern side of the entrance to the Swami Sannadhi the Navagrihas are worshipped; on the right is found the Goddess who stopped the floods. The Brahmotsava takes place in Panguni for this Lord; on the Uttira day is celebrated the Marriage festival.

Kacchi Mayanam :

The Sannadhi of Kacchi Mayana Perumal is found in the *Mantap* where the Dwajasthamba of Ekambarar Sannadhi is found. The Tirtha of the Deity is Sivaganga Tirtha found in the north of the *Dwajasthamba.* Kacchi Mayana Perumal is said to have used the Devas as *Samith* while performing a Sacrifiec to destroy *Pandasura.* The Sivaganga Tirtha is said to be the holy vessel of ghee used for the Sacrifice. Tirunavukkarasar has a fine devotional song dedicated to this *Sthala.* It describes the eternal bliss enjoyed by a *Muktha* who attains salvation;

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Thiruklamakottam :

Some three furlongs away from the temple of Kacchi Ekambarar is situated the *Kamakshi emple* in the south eastern direction. *'Ka'* denotes Brahma; *'A'* denotes Lord Vishnu and *'Aksha'* denotes the eyes. Thus the term *Kamakhi* is derived. She is also called *Kamakoti*, for any prayer to the Goddess for a particular blessing (Kāmya) results in manifold blessings showered on her devotee. Hence the name *Kama Kottam* also. Of all the *Pidas* where divine powder dwells, this is said to be the foremost;-hence the name *Adhi Pida*. The Goddess is seen in the *Padmasana* posture in the Sannadhi facing south east; Her figure is endowed with four hands ;a Sugarcane and a *Pāsa* are found on her left hands and an *Ankusa* and a bow of flower on her right; There is a *Sri Chakra* containing forty triangular forms before the Deity, which was first set by Adi Sankara. The *Pida* of Goddess Kamakshi is called *Kamakoti Pida*. The *Tapas* Kamakshi sannadhi is found on the right side of Kamakoti pida ; and Pilakasam is in front of the Sannadhi. The Utsava idol of *Pankahu Kamakshi* Amman belonging to this Sannadhi was taken to Tanjavoor during the Muslim riots and it is said to be still there. The Rajagopura is of a moderate size. In the western prahara is found the Ulakani tirtha. The *Kalla Perumal* Sannadhi is situated here, the Perumal being a manifestation of Lord Vishnu.

Kumara Kottam

This *Sthala* is dedicated to Lord Muruga, the son of Siva. Kumara Kottam is between the temples of Ekambar and Kama Kottam. All the three temples of Ekambar, Kamakshi and Kumara remind one of Somaskanda. Iswara being on the right, Parvathi on the left and *Skanda* in the middle. The *Sthalapurana* says that Muruga refused to free Brahma, whom he knuckled on the head and kept as a prisoner for being ignorant of the meaning of the *Pranva, "Oum"*. He did not obey even Lord Siva's command to give freedom to Brahma, thereupon Muruga is said to have made amends for his sin of disobedience by worshipping a Siva Linga which he formed and named *'Deva Senapadisar.'* This Linga was worshipped by Lord Vishnu also. We find the Deity facing east ; He is also called *"Uruhum Ullathan"* (One whose heart melts out of pity). Muruga's Sannadhi faces west. There are no *Moolava* deities of *Valli* and *Deivayanai*-beside Muruga. They are found as Utsava idols in the South and North *Praharas* of the Sannadhi.

Tirukacchi Melthali

'Thali' means temple in Tamil. As this temple is situated west of Kacchi Ekambar, it is called Thirukacchi Mel thali (Mel - west). The temple is one mile away from Ekambaranathar temple at Pillayarpalayam. The *Sthalapurana* says that Lord Vishnu did penance here longing for the form of Siva. Saint Tirugnanasambandar blessed Him that He would attain

Sivasaroopa and when Lord Vishnu listened to the devotional hymn of Tirugnana sambandar, He melted into the form of Siva Linga. Vishnu Sannadhi faces east and Mel thali Nathar, Siva worshipped by Him, faces west. To the east of this temple is the Sannadhi of *Urruk kettanathar* ("The Lord who listened intently). He is said to have leant his ears to Tirugnanasambandar when he sang in praise of Him. In the east of the temple is found the Sanadhi of Tirugnana Sambandar. The *Kanchee Purana* says that this *Sthala* is called *Pillayar Palayam* derived from Tirugnanasambanda Pillayar who stayed here. But Sekkilar has no reference to the Pillayar in his *Periapurana*. Tirunavkkarasar and Sundarar have devoted a pathika each to this place. The Lord of the *Sthala* is called *Tirumel Thali Nathar.*

Tiru ona Kandan Thali

The name of this temple is derived from the combination of two names of Asuras called ōnan and Kāāndan who attained salvation by worshipping Siva The *Linga* worshipped by Onan is called Oneswarar and the othre-worshipped by Kaāndan, Kaandeswarar. Both Sannadhis are situated separately in the same temple, facing east. Sundarar paid homage to this sthala and was rewarded with gold. The Saunadhi *Salandhareswarar* which was formerly elsewhere, is now found adjacent to this temple. This *Sthala* is one mile from Ekambaranathar temble to its west.

Kacchi Anehadha nkavatham

As Iswara was worshipped by Vinayaka of Kanchi (Anegam) is this place it is called so. Kubera, the Lord of wealth and other Devas also attained the grace of Siva by worshipping the Linga here. Sundarar has dedicated one of his finest pieces of hymns to the Lord of this place in the *Indola Pan* or *Raga.* It is one mile away from Ekambaranathar temple on the road leading to Kailasanathar temple. The Lord is called Anehadha-nkatheswarar.

Kacchi Neri Kaaraikkadu

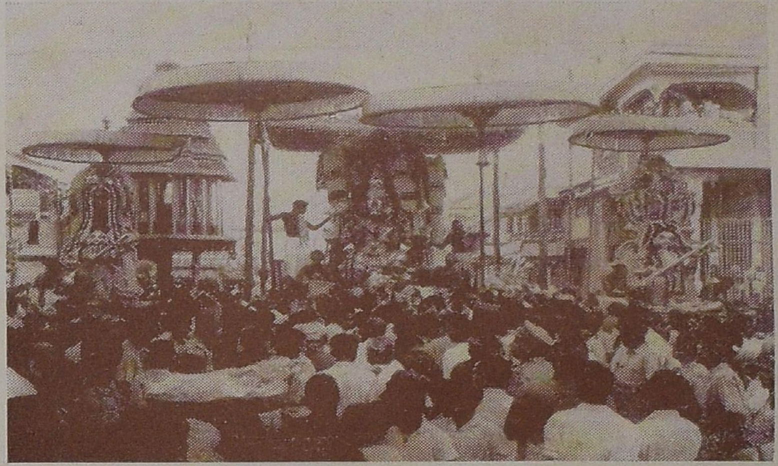
As this *Sthala* was noted for the dense growth of *Kaarai* plants, this was called *Karaikkadu* (the forest of *Kaarai*). *Sibi Indra* and *Budha* worshipped the Lord of this place; hence the name Indrapuri for the place and the tirtha is also called "*Indra Tirtha*". The Tirtha is now known as *Veppan Kulam,* Wednesday is the holiest to worship the Lord here. The Lord is called *Kaarai Thirunathar* and *Satya Viratheswaran.* The *Sthala* is also called *Satyaviratham* and the thirtha Satyaviratha tirtha. Tirugnanasambandar has paid homage to the place in his *Pathika.* This temple was built by the Cholas and it was renovated sixty years ago by Meyyappa Chettiar of Devakottai. The Sannadhi faces west and the place is now calied Karaimedu. The Utsava idols in the temple look beautiful and grand, The name *Karaimedu* is said to be derived from a Sand storm that

Murugan with Valli and Deivayani (as seen in all the temples including Tirutani)

Dancing Posture of Nataraja at Tiruvelankadu
(urthava Tandava)

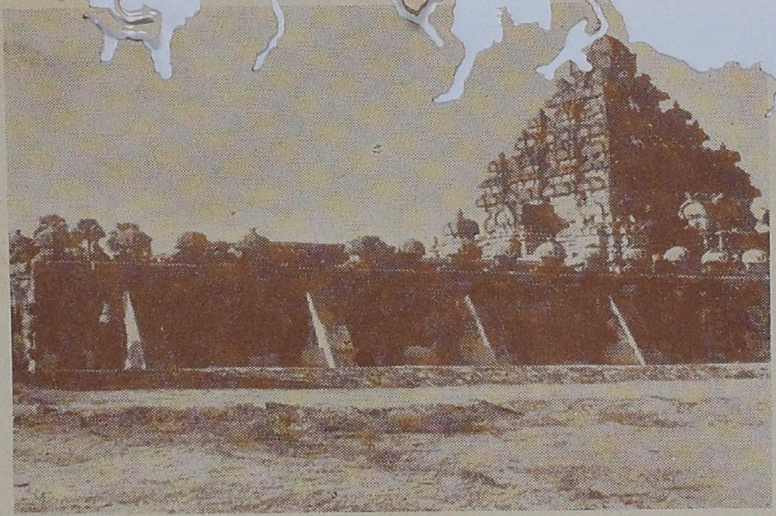
Goddess at Tiruvelankadu

Parthasarathi at Triplicane

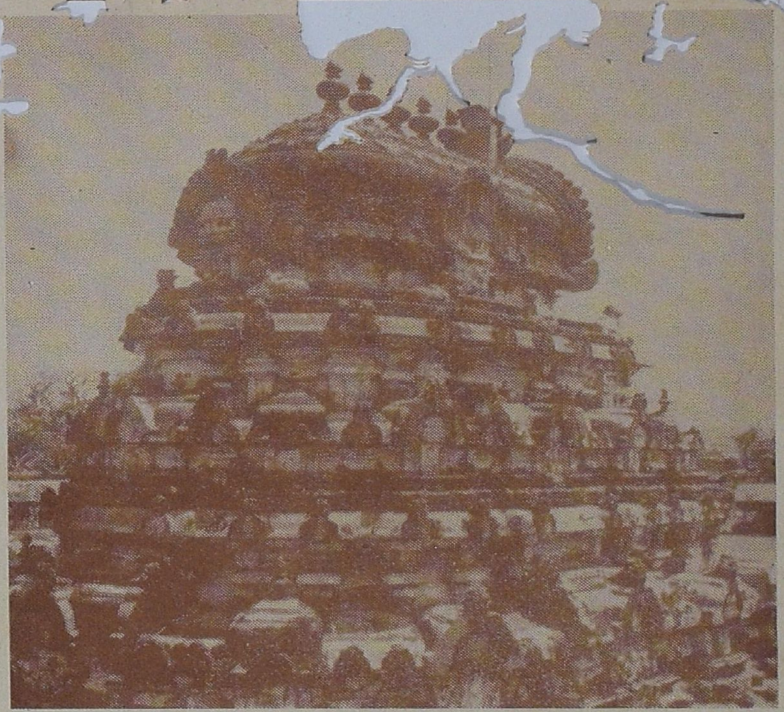


Mylapore Athikara nandhi

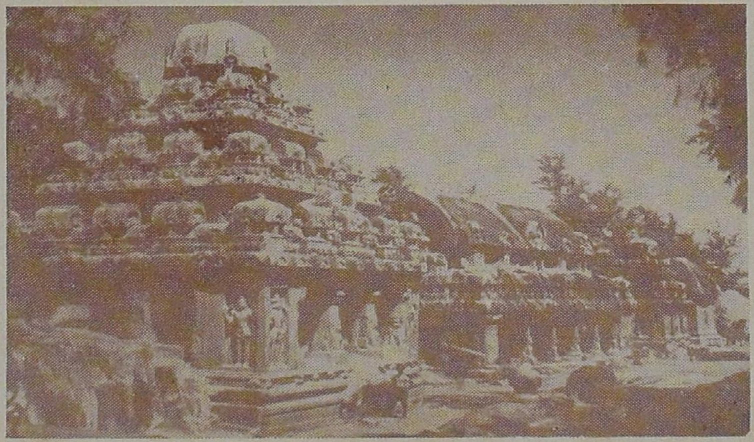
Mylapore Arupa[illegible] Muval



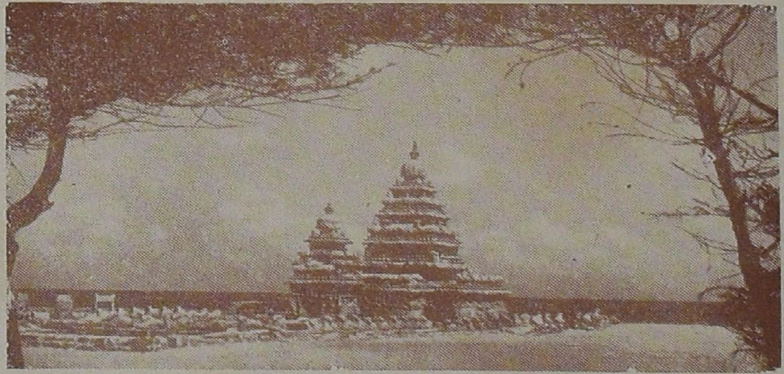
Kanchi Kailasanathar Temple (Palava)



Tiruvottiyur (Madras) - Tower of Siva Temple



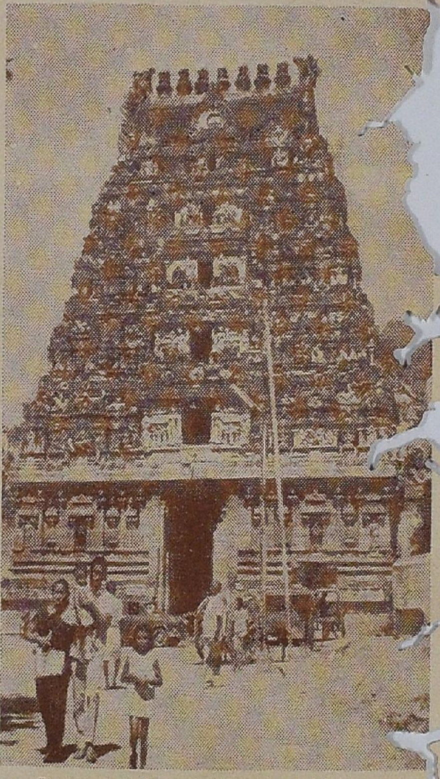
Kandal mallai - Panchapandavar Ratham (7th Century)



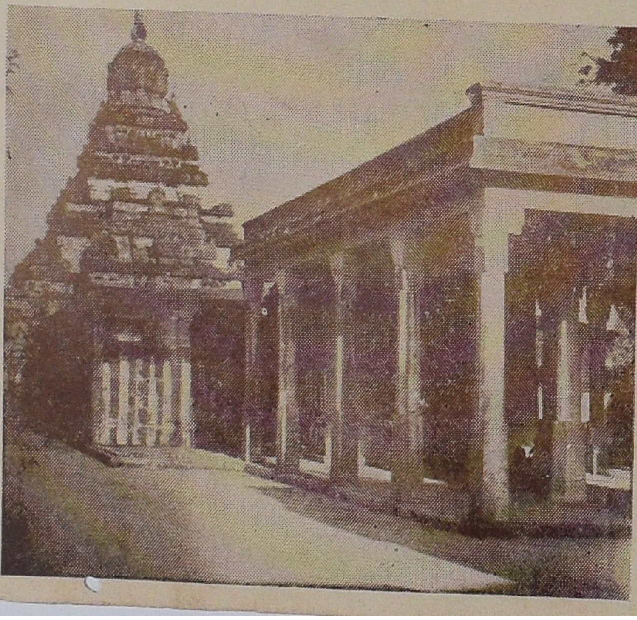
Kandal mallai - Shore Temple

Varadarajapperumal T[illegible] (Kanchee)
(with Athiva[illegible]thar Tower)

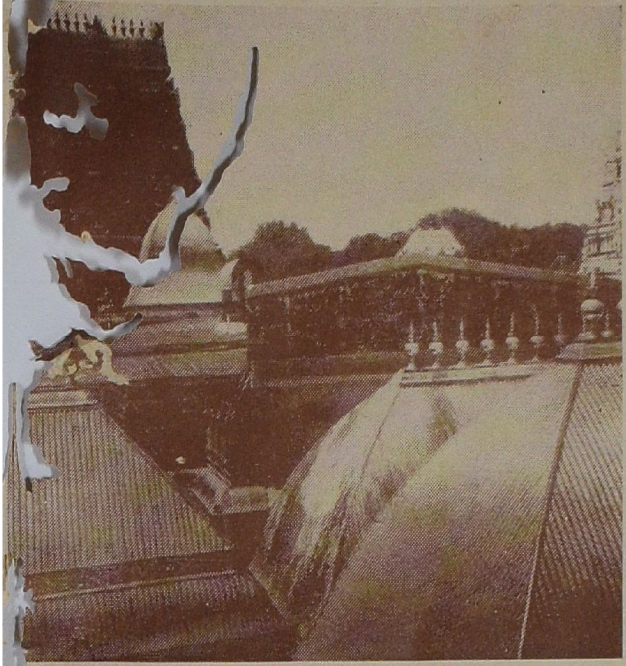
Mango Tree (Stala Virutsha of Kanchee
with Ekambareswara)



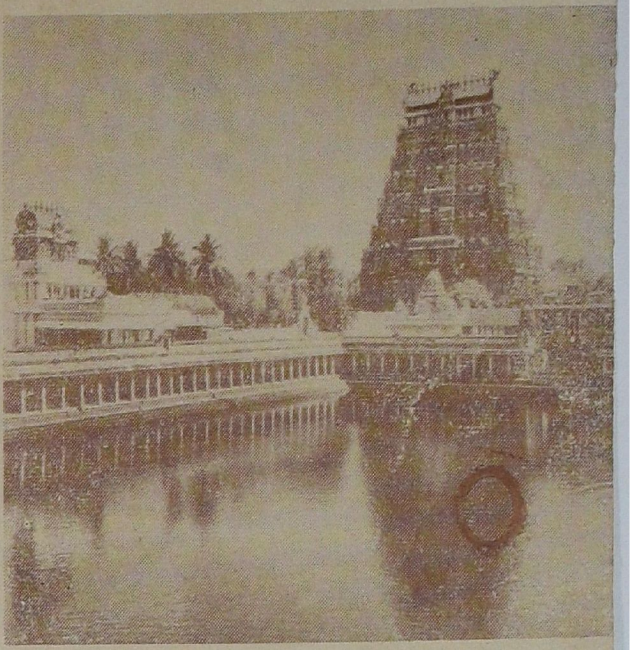
Tower of Kamakshiamman Temple
(Kancheepuram)



Vaikundapperumal Temple (Palava) Kancheepuram

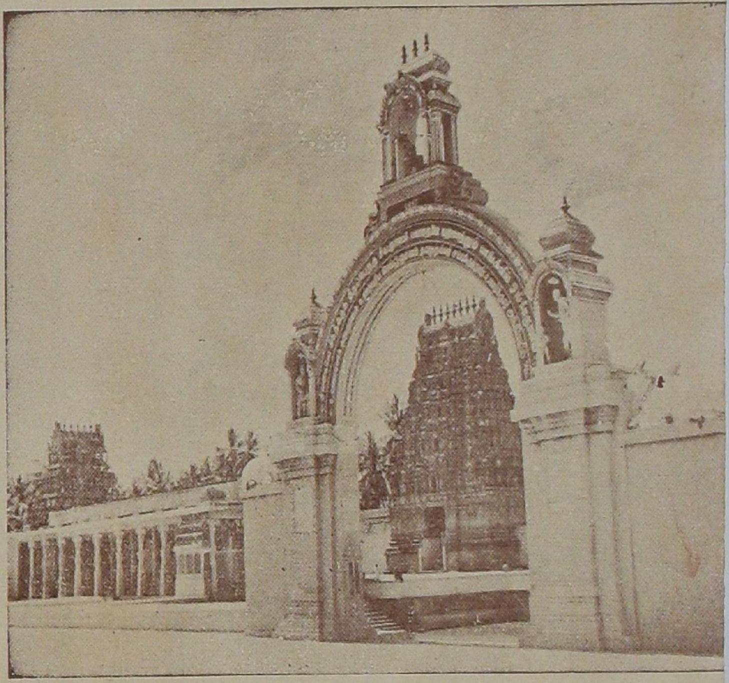


Ariel View of Sri Natarajan Temple - Chidambaram



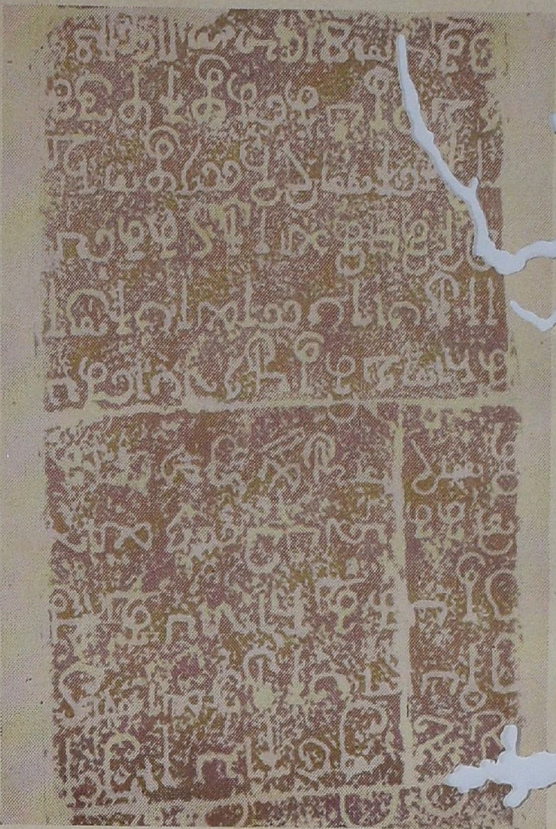
Siva Ganga (Temple Tank) of Chidambaram

Tirumulai pal (Sirkazi)
Parvathi gives milk to Gnanasambandar

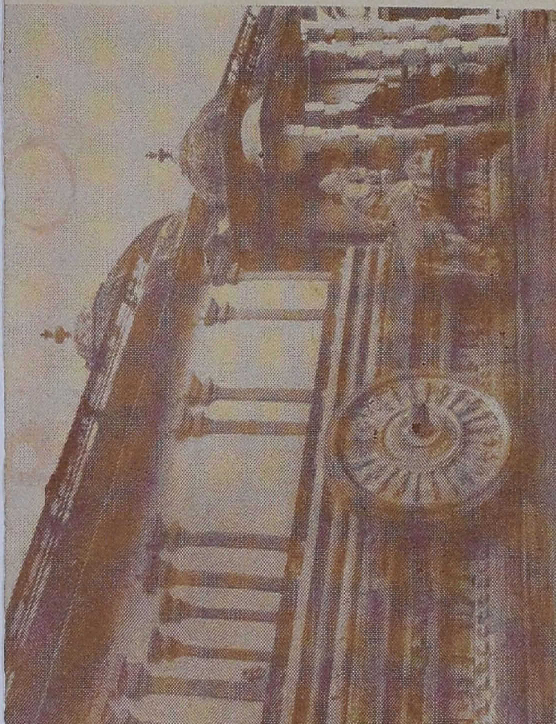


Sirkazi Temple

Muthukumaraswami (Vaitheswaran Koil)

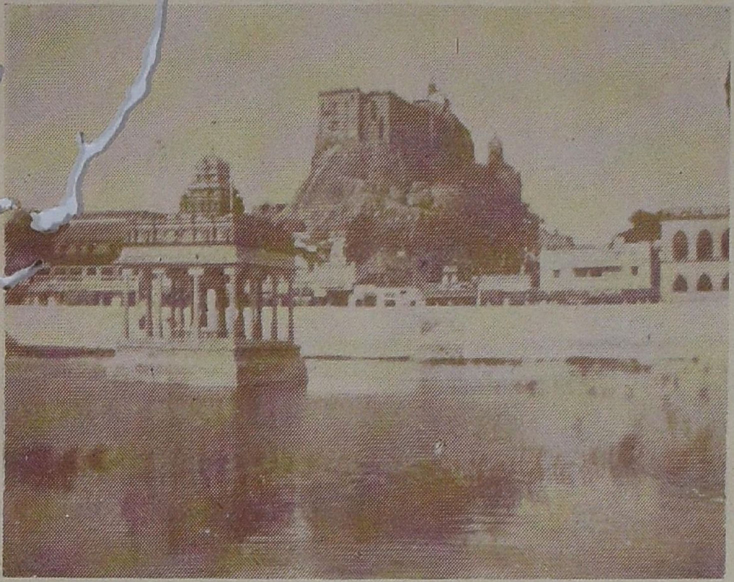


A model of Inscription - at Naheswarasw[illegible] [illegible]y Attiyal (Kum[illegible]onam)

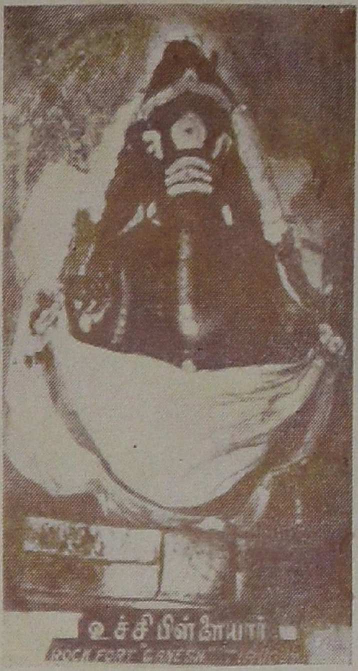


Mahamandapam - Naheswaraswamy Temple - Kumbakonam

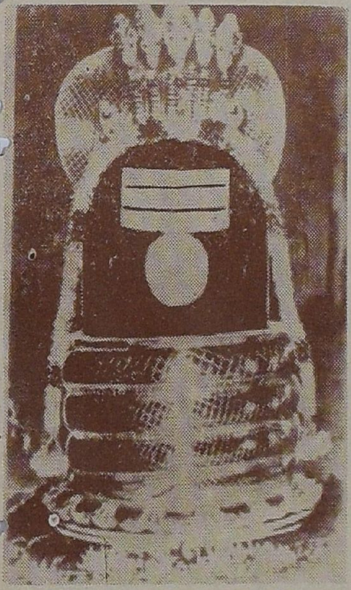
Tiruvanik[illegible] (Tri[illegible])



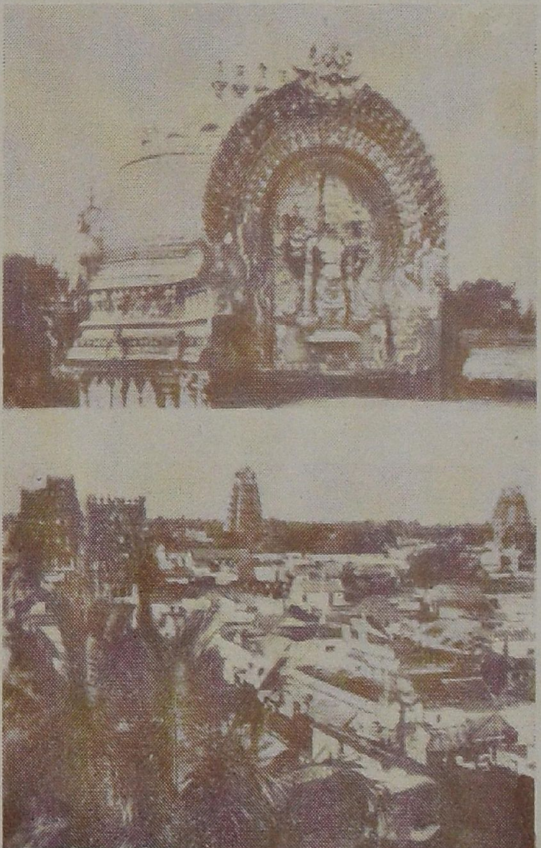
Rock Fort Temple (Trichy)



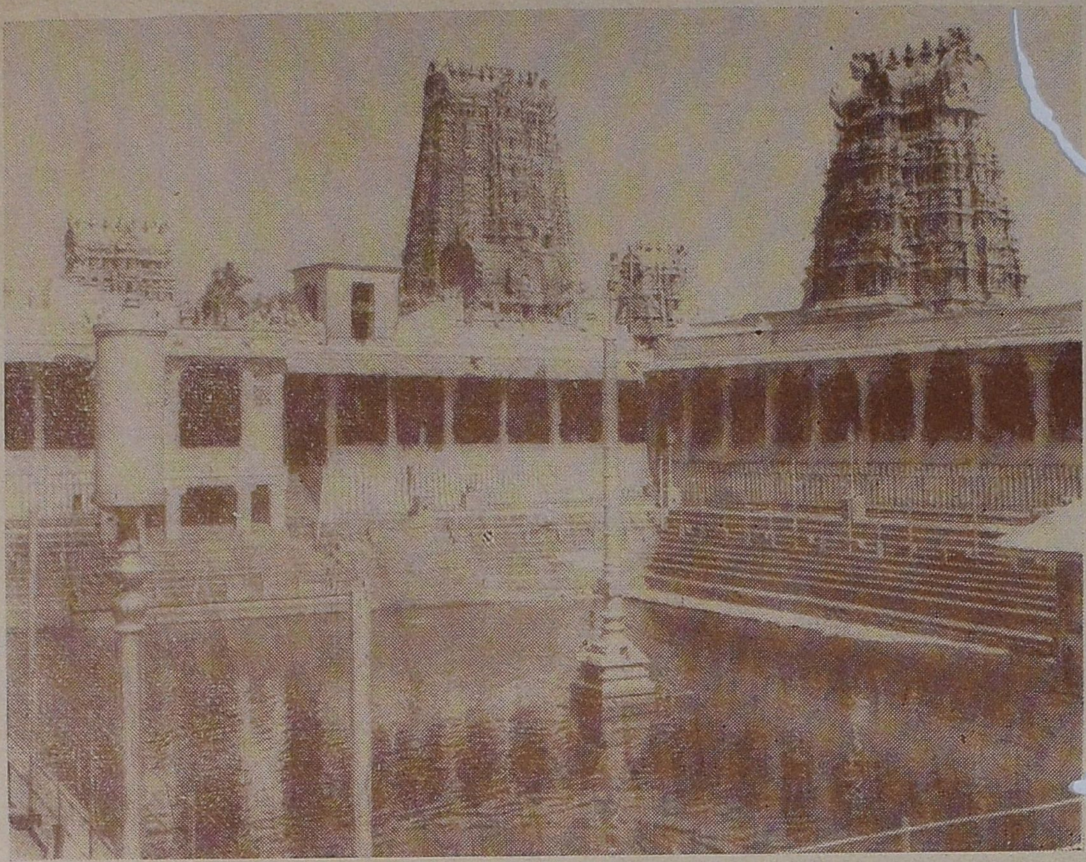
Uchipillaiyar (Trichy)



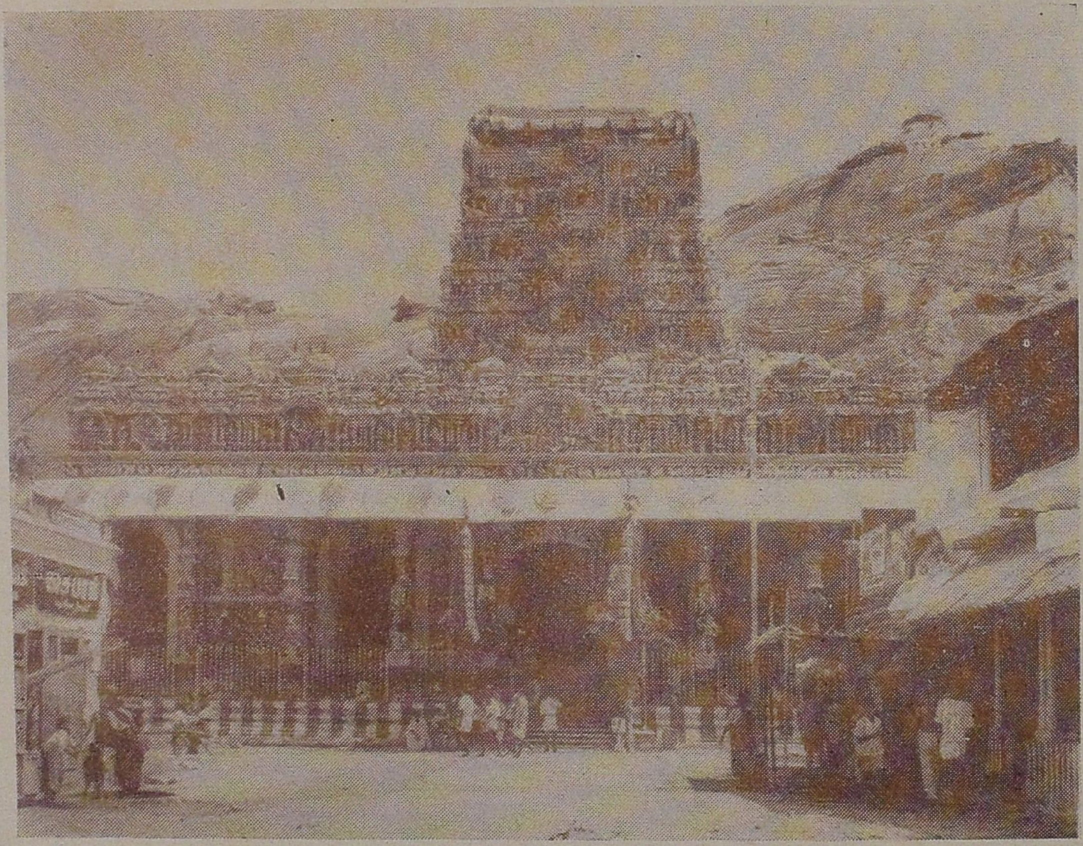
Tayumanavar (Trichy)



Sri Rangam - Town & Vimanam



Porramarai Tank - Meenakshi Temple - Madurai



Tirupparankunram Temple

avaged the place; it is said that there was a palace of the Cholas here, later covered by the Sands. Similarly the palace of the Pallavas was also covered by Sands, in the west; it is now called Pallavar *Medu* or Pali medu. The archaeological Department of india is taking great care in protecting this place.

In addition all the above mentioned temples, there are also many others dating back to the times of the Pallava rulers and the later periods. A detailed account of all of them is found in the *Kanchee Puranam* written by Kacchiappa Munivar. It is not necessary to give an account of all here. Howeve there still remains one temple which is important and which we should not fail to mention. It is the *Kailasanathar Temple* built by Rajasimha Pallava. Some 1200 years have gone by after it was built and yet it continues to be a great *Sthala.* Swami Vibulananda says that the temple resembles the shape of Mount Kailas itself. There are many Pallava inscriptions also which speak the glories of the temple in a detailed manner. It is found surrounded by fields in the south of *Sarva Tirtha.* We can reach the temple by Putheri street. Poojas are offered daily twice today. The tower is an everlasting monument to the architectural skill of the Pallavas. The small rooms in the praharas and sculptures carved on the walls are remarkable. There is an account of the Kumbabisheka of the temple in the *Periapuranam.* There was a saint Pusala Nayanar at Tiruninravoor near Madras. He was a great devotee of Siva. He meditated on Him for ever and erected mentally a temple for Him too. Then he fixed up a day for enshrining Iswara in the temple of his heart. By a strange coincidence Rajasimha Pallava had fixed up the same day for performing the Kumbabisheka of this temple which he had just then completed at Kancheepuram. Just a few days prior to the one fixed for the function, *Iswara* appeared in the King's dream and asked him to fix up some other day for Kumbabisheka, for, He would go to the temple built by Pusalar Nayanar at Tiruninravoor, on the day fixed by the King. Thus Siva told that he would not be present for Kumbabishekam on the fixed day. The King realised that there was a devotee who was greater than himself at Tiruninravoor, went there himself and worshipped the Nayanar. On another day he performed the Kumbabisheka. Thus the Kailasanathar koil has attained unique glory, associated as it is, with puranas and history. A grand festival takes place here on the Mahasivaratri Day in Masi.

VISHNU TEMPLES

Athi Giri or Varadarajaperumal Temple.

So far we were concerned with only Siva temples at Kancheepuram. There are also many Vishnu temples here of which *Athi Giri* or Varadaraja Perumal temple is the most famous. The Lord is also called Arulala Perumal. The *Moolavar* is in the standing posture. It is said that formerly the figure was carved in wood (Fig) and that was placed at the bed of the Tirtha of the place. This

wooden figure of the Deity was taken out a few years ago and replaced in the tirtha after it was cleaned. The present *Moolavar* sannadhi faces west. The Goddess is Perum Devi Thayar. Vimana is *Punyakoti*. This is *Satyavira ha Kshetra*. The Lord stands in all divine majesty on an elevated ground which looks like a hill. Iravadha the Heavenly elephant is said to have taken the form of the Hill to bear the Lord on his back: hence the place-name *Atthi Giri*. We have to ascend a flight of steps to have a *Darsan* of Moolavar. Many have attained the grace of Lord Vishnu by worshipping Varadaraja. *Brighu Maharishi* was one of them. *Narada, Tiru Anandalwar, Gajendra* and *Brahma* had all received the blessings of Vishnu who appeared in person before them. The *Sthalapurana* speaks in detail regarding the spiritual heritage of this place. There are many *Tirthas* to this place of which *Ananda Sarasu*, Sesha tirtha, Varaha tirtha, Brahma tirtha, Padma tirtha, and Agni tirtha are important. The Vegavatai (the river that runs near the temple) is also said to be a tirtha.

Numberless are the festivals celebrated here of which the *Garuda Sevai* coming in Vaikasi Poornima is the most famous. That day falls on the third day of Brahmotsava. The *Garuda Sevai* in all Vishnu temples synchronises with the full moon day; it is on this day that all festivals come to an end in all Siva temples also. The full moon Day in Vaikasi *Visakam* is the holiest day and thousands of people from Madras and other parts of the country come to this city to worship the *Garuda Sevai* of Varadaraja Perumal on the day. In fact this is the greatest festival of the City. On the seventh day of Brahmotsava-after three days from Garuda sevai, the car festival also is important and that too attracts large crowds. Moreover, the Lord is taken in procession to many of the suburban villages on many days of the year and wherever He goes He draws with Him thousands and thousands of devotees. Tirumangai Alwar, among others, has paid homage to the Lord in many of his *Pasuras*. It is said that wherever the term *Kacchi* appears in the Vaishnava devotional songs, only this *Sthala* is meant. This is one of the three important pilgirm centres for Vaishnavas, the other two being Tirupathi and Srirangam. The *Sthalapurana* says that once Brahma did *Aswamedha Yaga* using the Atthi giri as *Uttira Meedai*. Then Lord Vishnu appeared in the *Punyakoti Vimana* springing from Atthi giri and granted Brahma the boon he asked for. Thus the Lord came to be called Varadaraja. Budat talwar sings of the Lord thus:

> e<u>n</u>nenca meeyaa<u>n</u> e<u>n</u>ce<u>n</u><u>n</u>iyaa<u>n</u> taa<u>n</u>ava<u>n</u>ai
> va<u>n</u>ne<u>n</u>cam kiinṭa maniva<u>ṇṇ</u>a<u>n</u>—mu<u>n</u><u>n</u>amceey
> uuliyaa<u>n</u> uulipeyarttaa<u>n</u> ulakeettum
> aaliyaa<u>n</u> attiyuu raa<u>n</u> (95)

Here too are many inscripitions and sculptures belonging to the time of the rulers of Vijayanagar. The sculptures at the hundred pillar-mantap are noted for

their ravishing beauty. The inscriptions speak of *Acchutha Raya* of Vijayanagar who came to the place with his wife to worship Varadaraja and did many charities. Other inscriptions-belonging to the Chola period are also historically important.

Ashtabujakaram :

This is also one of the Hundred and eight important Vishnu *Sthalas.* The temple is situated adjacent to the main bazaar of the city (Adison pet), near the place where the car of Varadaraja is stationed (தேரடி). The sannadhi faces west and the Lord is in the standing posture. The name of the Lord is Adhikesava Perumal and that of the Goddess is Alarmelmangai. Vimana is *Gaganakruti.* The *Sthalapurana* says that *Gajendra* attained the blessings of the Lord here who apeared before him. There is also a *Gajendra Tirtha.* As the Lord is endowed with eight arms, the temple is called Ashta buja kara Perumal temple. He is known as "Ashtabujan" also for short. Tirumangai Alwar and Peyalwar have dedicated some moving hymns to this Lord.

Tiruthan Ka

This place, worshipped by Tirumangai Alwar, is situated some three furlongs away from Adisonpet in the southern direction. The Lord is named Vilakkoli-Perumal; there are other names also like Deepa Prakasa and Divaja Prakasa. The Deity is in the standing posture in the Sannadhi facing west. The Goddess is Maragadavalli Thayar. The *Vimana* is *Sri Kara Vimana.* Saraswathi, the Goddess of learning is said to have attained the Lord's blessings, by worshipping Him here. The tirtha is also called Saraswathi tirtha. It was in this *Sthala* that Vedanta Desika, one of the greatest of Vaishnava teachers, was born; it is said that he was born in the fourteenth century. Vedanta Desika is considered as the Acharya or spiritual leader of the Vaishnavas, particularly those beloging to the *Vadakalai* sect.

Vellukai :

This is a *Divyasthala* honoured by *eyalwar* in his songs. Tirumangai Alwar also has paid homage to this place, The temple is now called Mukunda Nayaka Temple. It is situated two mills away from the station in the east. The Lord faces east in the standing posture. Mukundanayakar is the name of the God and Vellukai Valli that of the Goddess. The *Vimana* is *Kanaka Vimana.* The *Purana* says that Brighu Maharishi worshipped the Lord of this place and had *Darsan* of the Lord. Perhaps Kanaka Saraswathi is the tirtha of the place.

Padakam : *(Pandava Perumal Temple)* :

This is situated in the Big Kancheepuram, some three furlongs to the South of Ekambaranathar temple. Today it is called *Pandavaa Thoothar Temple.* ("The

temple of Pandava's messenger") Lord Krishna who was the (*Dhutha*) messenger of the Pandavas is enshrined in the temple with His two wives. The Lord is called Pandava Dhooda and the Goddess are Rukmini and Satyabama. The *Vimana* is *Bhadra vimana*. The tirtha of the place is *Matsya* tirtha. Of the many devotees to the Lord the *Purana* mentions King *Janamejaya* and *Harida Maharishi*. Lord Krishna blessed both by appearing before them with Rukmini and Satyabama. One of the inscriptions found in the temple refers to the Lord as '*Dhoota Hari*'. Tirumazisai Alwar, Tirumangai Alwar, Bhudat talwar, and Peyalwar have all paid homage to the *Sthala* by dedicating their songs to the Lord of the place.

Neerakam (*Jagadeesa Perumal*) :

This is situated one mile away from the station. Tirumangai Alwar has sung of the Lord Jagadeesa. The Deity is found in the standing posture in the sannadhi facing east. The Goddess is Nilamangaivalli and the Vimana Jagadeeswara Vimana. Sage *Akrura* worshipped the Lord who appeared before him here and showered His blessings on him. Naturally the tirtha of the place is called *Akrura Tirtha*,

Urakam (Ulakalanda Perumal) :

Tirumangai Alwar and Tirumazisai Alwar have sung of the Lord in their Pasuras. Lord Vishnu as Trivikrama covered all space by his strides; hence the name Ulakalanda Perumal (The Lord who measured all the World). This is situated in Big Kancheepuram 6 furlongs from the station. The Deity is seen standing in a majestic divinity; He is seen in the posture of *Trivikrama* facing west. The Goddess is Amudhavalli Nachiyar. The *Vimana* is *Sara Srikara Vimana*. *Urakam* is another name for Adisesha who worshipped the Lord here and attained His blessings. The *Naga Tirtha* is in front of the temple.

Tiru Veஃha : (Yathoktha Kari) :

This *Sthala* also has been immortalised by Tirumanagi and Tirumazisai Alwars in their *Pasuras*. The temple is near Adisonpet. The Lord is called in Tamil "*Sonna Vannam Seytha Perumal*". (*Yathoktha Kari* in sanskrit—He who did as he was told). The Lord is in the reclining posture in the sannadhi facing west. The *Ithihga* is that Lord Vishnu reclined thus to stop the floods of the *Vegavavadhi*. Thus he is said to have damned the Vehavathi; hence the name Tiruveka in Tamil. (Vehavathi Anai=Vehanai=Vehnai=Veஃha). The Godess is Vedavalli Thayar. There is a holy tank (Pushkarani) called Poigai Pushakrni. It is said that Poigai Alwar was born here; hence this name. The Lord is said to have appeared here before his devotees like Poigai Alwar, Brahma and Kani kannan.

It is interesting to note the origin of the Lord's name. It is said that he acted according to the wish of Kanikannan, a disciple of Poigai Alwar. The *Purana* is as follows:

When Kanikannan was residing at Kanchi, the Pallava ruler of the day requested him to sing his glories; Kanikannan refused to do so for he would sing only of God and not of any mortal being. Then the King banished him out of Kanchi. Thereupon the baktha requested Lord Vishnu also to accompany him and leave Kanchi. The song he sang at that time is said to be:

kaṇikaṇṇa͟n pooki͟nṛaa͟n kaamarupuṅ kacchi
maṇivaṇṇaa niikiṭakka veeṇṭaa—tuṇivuṭaiya
cennaap pulava͟num yaa͟n celki͟nreе͟n niiyumu͟nṛa͟n
painaakap paaycuruṭṭik kol

The force and the sweeping majesty of the lines in Tamil are indeed remarkable. The Lord is said to have followed Kanikannan immediately "rolling in his hands the Adisesha, his bed". Some attribute the song to Poigai Alwar himself, the mester of Kanikannan. Whoever it might be, God left Kanchi bidden by His Baktha. Kanikannan, Lord Vishnu and Adisesha stayed for a day on the banks of the river, *Palar*. The King who realised his mistake ran up to them and begged them to pardon him and to return. They showed him mercy and the Lord returned to his original place requested by his Baktha to do so. The place where the Three stayed for a night is called "*Oriaavu Irukkal*" in Tamil; today it is shortened into "*Orikkai*". Thus the Lord who acked according to the wish of his *Baktha* is called "*Sonna Vannam Seytha Perumal*".

There are certain other *Vishnu Sthalas* which have been consecrated by the *Mangala Saasanam* (Or Pasuras) of Alwars. They are the *Nilat thinkal thunda Perumal* sannadhi at Ekambaranathar temple, Karakam and Karvanam at Ulakalanda Perumal temple, Kalvanur at Kamakshi temple and *Pavalavanna* perumal temple. Many are the Maharishis who received the blessings of Vishnu by worshipping them in there places. All the temples are well looked after today.

Above all, there is another temple which is as much important to the *Vaishnavas*, as the Kailasanathar temple for the *Saivites*. It is the *Vaikundaperumal Koil*. The inscriptions refer to the place as *Parameswara Vinnakaram*. Perhaps it was built at the time of Parameswara Pallava and he might have been a great devotee of this Lord. Hence the name. The temple is very near the station. The God is Paramapada Nathar and the Goddess is Vaikundavalli. The Vimana is *Mukunda Vimana*. In the 'lower' temple the Deity is in the sitting posture facing west. The figure is beautifully carved and it is a fine example of Pallava sculpture. There are two floors above the lower temple. In the first floor the Lord is seen in the rectining posture and in the second he is seen standing. There are

many figures of Pallava Kings and of the important events connected with their lives carved in the temple. Tirumangai Alwar has dedicated a song to the Lord Kailasanathar temple in the west and Vaikunda Perumal temple in the east adorn the city of Kanchi and impart to it a unique glory.

In day of yore Buddhism and Jainism flourished in the city. The Tamil epic *Manimekalai* written in the Second century A D. testifies to the thriving of Buddhism at Kanchi. Yuan Swang the Chinese traveller who came here during the seventh century refers to the existence of hundreds of Buddhist and Jain *Viharas* and *Pallis* and thousands of Buddhists and Jains living there at that time. The later Cholas had Kancheepuram as their capital. It was here that Kulottunga Chola stayed and assisted Karunakara Tondaiman to conquer Orissa (Kalingam). Thus Kancheepuram has been not merely a great religious centre but also intimately connected with the history of our land from the earliest times.

The city attained its peak of glory under the Pallavas as their capital. The numberless inscriptions in the various temples give us invaluable information regarding the rulers of the land and the history of the city itself. The Mutt of Adi Sankara at Kamakoti lends an additional lustre of spiritual wealth to the city.

The city is flourishing noted especially for the manufacture of silk sarees. There are thousands of families here who depend on weaving for their livelihood and we have almost all religionists represented in the population of the city.

There are quite a large number of choultries to facilitate pilgrims and a few good hotels. Special mention must be made of the "Javuli Kadai" choultry at Adisonpet. There are many choultries run on communal basis. There is a town-bus service to go to any part of the city and there are plenty of *Jutkas* (Horse-drawn carts) too. Thus Kancheepuram is one of the places where tourists and pilgrims could stay comfortably.

SOUTH ARCOT DISTRICT

11. CHIDAMBARAM

Chidambaram, the famous *Siva Sthala* is situated in South Arcot District on the Madras-Tiruchy main line, between Mayavaram and Villupuram. To the *Saivites* the very word *Kovil* or temple refers to Chidambaram just as it refers to Srirangam to the *Vaishnavites*. Of course, there is no reference to the temple in

the works of the early Sangam period; however it flourishes as the most sacred Siva sthala ever since the end of the dark period in the history of Tamil Nad viz. the Sixth century. Thus it appears that the temple must have been built sometime between the second and fifth centuries A.D. Ever since this holy city of Lord Nataraja enjoys unique glory as an important religious centre; the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Rayas of Vijayanagar have all made endowments of lands and gold to the temple and enriched it. It is the only temple in Tamil Nad where both Siva and Vishnu are enshrined so near each other that all devotees can worship both at the same time. The *Sanndhi* of Lord Nataraja is called *Chit Sabai* or *Chitrambalam.* The *Sannadhi* of Govindaraja (Lord Vishnu) is called *Tillai Tiruchitra Kootam.* It is said that Kulotunga II a Chola ruler (1133-1150) threw the idol of Lord Govindaraja into the sea out of excessive love for Lord Siva and later, one of his discendants reclaimed it and installed it in the temple.

Many are the books written on the structure and history of the temple and the uniue idol of Lord Nataraja; the recent publication of the Annamalai University called *"The University Environs"* written by Sri J. M. Somasundaram Pillai, gives a detailed account of the temple. Sri Pillai says as follows ;

> "The Main entrance to the temple is through the great eastern door. Led by a flight of low broad stone steps (பாளைப்படிகள்), the third inner prakara-*The Kulottunga Cholan Kanda Tiruveedhi* is reached. It is of majestic proportions, with aisles of well-carved granite pillars, and roofed with stone slabs about 25 feet in length. From here, the aisles branch out towards the south and north, and at the centre towards the west. Raised platforms are on side of these aisles, and aginst the walls a double pile of storeyed cloisters, with smaller shrenes. Kattalai rooms on the sides are distributed throughout. The aisle on the south stops near the Nritta Sabha, and is continued on the west throughout. At the centre of the western aisle. there is a second great door-way, the *Akalangan-Tiruvasal*, with an ornate mandapam outside, standing on eighteen pillars. This gives entrance into the temple for worshippers from the western gopuram gateway and the outer prakara-*The Raasakkal Tambiran irumaligai Tiruveedhi.* The door is named after "*Akalangan*"-the Chola Kulottunga III, who consturcted this third inner wall and the great western entrance. The doorway leads down into the prakara again through a flight of stone steps. The worshippers here faces a Vinayaka, who nestles in a niche on top of the wall opposite. He is the உச்சிப்பிள்ளையார், also 'known as *Tiru-Muri-Kanda Vinayakar*, who pointed to the spot, wherein the *Tiruppadikam* collections lay deposited, when Raja Raja Chola came here in their quest. The Vinayaka remains as before facing the western doorway; the former vault of the *Tiruppadikams* at this western corner is now the

sanctum of the Samayacharyas. The western and northern cloisters adjoining the main wall accommodate the sanctuary of the sixty-three Nayanmars. Here they receive daily *Arathana.*

The Tiru - Moolattanesvara Shrine :

Between the third wall and the central aisle, there is the *Tiru-Moolat-anam* shrine with a surrounding corridor of a double row of pillars and a Chandeswara Sanctum. This ancient sanctum of the swayambu Sivalinga, with the shrine of the Goddess Parvati as Umaiammai in front, faces the south. In the southern wall of this shrine, there are two niches one for Dakshinamurti and the other for Irattaip-pillayar and Vallabai Vinayaka.

The Alankara - Mandapam:

The Alankara-mandapam is at the end of this prakara. This is the place where the idols are decorated for festival processions which are to give darsan to the devotees in the Car streets. The prakaras and their colossal aisles and pillars have been renovated by the Ve-Sa-family of Kanadukaathan, whose *Ishta-Devata* is Lord Nataraja.

The central aisle has to its right, the *Deva Sabha* and leads on a Second *Tiruvasal* at its further end. Crossing it, the quadrangle bearing the central sanctum: the Perambalam is reached.

The Perambalam:

The Perambalam is 325 feet square and its eastern, northern and western sides are enriched with a storeyed cloister. On the raised platform are shrines to Narthana Vinayakar, Lingodhbhavamurti, Subrahmanyam, the *Palliarai* of the God, also Kala Samharamurthi, and Biksha-atana on the north and east. This storeyed cloister is found repeated in the Sivakami temple, as also in the outer most prakaras designed for the purpose of affording shelter to the pilgrims for meditation and temporary stay. The lower tier of the platform is embellished with an admirable panel of embossed sculptuary in *Alto-Relievo,* of scenes from the sixty-four sacred sports (*Tiruvilaiyadals*) of Siva at Madurai.

To the east of the golden canopied central structure, there is the shrine of Brahma Chandes-wara. A well on its side is the Paramananda Koopam. It furnishes water of excellent quality used for the abishekas, and which preserve the beauty of the images un-impaired for centuries. The sacred water is much sought after, and the privilege of sprinkling its sacred drops is allowed for the general public on festive days.

The Great Sanctum :

The great court of Tillai is the golden canopied structure. Its central part is the Chit-Sabha, the sanctum of the mystic cosmic dance of Lord Nataraja with Goddess Sivakamasundari to His left. There is, besides, in this Sabha to their left the sanctum of Swarna Kaala Bhairavar. Its frontal mandapam is the Kanaka Sabha. They stand on a raised stone basement, their three sides have wooden walls and the fourth has besides windows, and its golden canopy borne on beams placed, over five pillars.

A covered cloister of polished black granite, on its three sides on a row of double pillars, has been added to this ancient wooden structure by the Tiruppani Nagarathars.

The Sabhas and the Sabha-Nayaka :

The place of the dance of Lord Nataraja for the beatification of His fervent devotees became the *Ambalam* or Sabha. Four others came in turn to be associated with the central one, the five together giving the name of *Sabhanayaka* and *Sabhapati* to the presiding Lord.

The *Chit-Sabha* or the Mystic hall is the inner-most portion of the temple. It is the holiest. This Chit sabha, also known as Chit Ambalam has in turn given its name to the temple, and to the town. This sabha is the *Sanctum-Sanctorum* of Nataraja. Here Lord Nataraja is seen dancing, and to his left is the Sanctum of the goddess Sivakamasundari. To his right is the Chidambaram Rahasyam, wherein there is no image or Linga but a *Tiruvaaṣi*-a semi circular arch or prabha with a veil in front. The *Prabha* is marked by a string of golden bilwa leaves hung over it, the *Parbha* revealing mere etherial space-the invisible presence - the symbol of God. It is for the worship of Siva in His Akasic or Formless form, invisible to human eyes. His worship is also associated with His form as the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Void. The other four places held sacred to such special worship in the form of elements being: Kanchee as Earth. Tiruvaanaikka as water, Tiruannamalai as Fire and Kalahasti as air. St. Manickavachakar refers to this Akasic form of Siva in Tillai:

puutaṅkal aintaakip pulaṉaakip porulaakip
peetaṅkal anaittumaayp peetamillaap perumaiyiṉaik
keetaṅkal keṭuṭtaaṇṭa kilaroliyai marakatattai
veetaṅkal toluteetum vilankutillai kaṇṭeeṉee (Manicka Vachakar)

The stone steps leading to the Chit-Sabha are five in number and are plated with silver. They are said to represent the five mystic letters of the *Panchaak Shara Mantra*: Na, ma, ci, va, ya. The door posts are of silver, and bear embossed representations of Vyaghrapada and Patanjali on either side figuring as Dwarapalakas.

(i) The sanctum of Lord Nataraja and Sivakamasundari in the Chit Sabha faces the south. A raised rectangular mandapam stands opposite on forty pillars. This mandapam faces both the sanctums of Govindaraja and Nataraja shrines. A doorway (tiruvaasal) on the southern prakara wall opens into a majestic mandapam outside in the third prakara, borne on four colossal and well sculptured pillars. The *Dwajastambha* of *Nataraja* stands at its centre encased in gold. Against this Dwaja Stambha (flag staff) is Nataraja's Chariot in stone, the Nritta Saba.

(ii) *The Kanaka Sabha* is the frontal complement to the Chit Sabha. It is a small porch, standing on the same stone basement with wooden doors all round. This and the Chit Sabha are together roofed with plates of copper, gilt with gold: the halls bear the name of *Kanaka Sabha* or *Ponnambalam.*

Successive Chola Kings from Aditya I (A.D. 870-90) and the Pandyas have vied with each other in renewing the roof with gold from time to time. It is in Kanaka Sabha that the daily poojas to the Lord in Chit-Sabha are performed, as well, the six abishekas and arathanas for the Chandramouleesvara spatika Linga, known as அழகிய திருச் சிற்றம்பல முடையார், and Ratna-Sabhapati. *Ratna-Sabhapati* is an exact replica of Nataraja, carved out of a rose coloured crystal about 6" by 3", and to this image abisheka and worship is conducted daily once during the second puja of the day at about 10 a.m.

(iii) *The Deva Sabha* lies outside the central courtyard, and in third prakara to the east of Nataraja's sanctum. It is a spacious square hall, walled on all sides, and bearing within it the icons and artistic treasures of temple. Pujas to the Utsava icons are conducted here, also their *Abisheka*, *Alankara* and *Arathana* before they are taken out on festival processions.

(iv) *The Nritta Sabha* or the Hall of the Dance is the most interesting and most artistic structure of the temple. It is ascribed to Chola Kulottunga III (A.D. 1178-1216). It is posssibly the earliest of the splendid edifices in the temple. Here stood the original shrine of the goddess Kali in the Tillai forest of old. It is a graceful mandapam of exquisite style, supported by 56 pillars, about 8 feet high and most delicately carved from top to bottom.

It rests on a stylobate, ornamented with graceful dancing figures and with wheels and prancing horses at its sides—the whole representing a chariot on wheels. The *Bas Relief* of Siva playing music on a five-mouthed pot *Panchamuka Vadyam,* decorates one of the tiers of sculptures on the front facade of this mandapam; also a little higher up a graceful statuesque figure of Kulottunga III, Nataraja as Virdhva Tandava Murti with Kali dancing is being worshipped at this sanctum.

(v) The *Raja Sabha* is the fifth of the series. It is the *Devasiriya Mandapam,* the Hall of state; thousand-pillared, and 338 feet long by 197 feet wide. It is ascribed to Chola Kulottunga III (1178-1216) who built it for the purpose of St. Sekkizhar's inauguiating the *Tirut-Tondar-Puranam.*

Three sculptured reliefs of great artistic, cultural and probably historic interest are pointed to on the granite panels flanking the upper flight of stairs, leading from the south into the Hall of the 1000 pillars. They are three "Chitrardha" sculptures, one representing a young lady in graceful posture, 2nd and 3rd representing her attendants:—possibly suggesting Buddhist influence. (Sec. B.V.N. & P.S. in *Journal of the Annamalai University.* III ii. p. 276.)

The Stala Purana:

The Stala Puranas give the genesis of the temple, and its growth. *Koil Puranam* by St. Umapati Sivachariar, *Chidambara Puranam* by Tillaipurana Tirumalainathar, *Chidambaram Mahatmyam* by Arumukha Navalar and Tiru-Chitra Koota Mahatmyam by Puduvai Ramanuja Navalar are in Tamil; and those in Sanskrit are *Tillaivana Mahatmyam, Vyaghrapura-Mahatmyam, Pundarikapura Mahatmyam, Chidambara Mahatmyam* and *Yema Sabhanatha Mahatmyam,* also *Chidambara Rahasyas, Bhujangastakams, Kavachams, Stotrams* and *Natakas* of devotional interest. Mention may also be made of several other classics in Tamil in honour of this shrine."

(University environs by J. M. S. pp 56 to 66)

The *Sthala* is also called *Tillai.* Perhaps the name was derived from the *Tillai* trees which were found here in plenty long ago; another name for the place is *Tillaivanam* (the forest of *Tillai*); there is also a Tillai Kali temple situated north of the city, which attracts a huge crowd every day. The *Sthala-purana* says that a serpent and a Tiger worshipped Lord Siva here and continue to enjoy the cosmic Dance of siva even today. The dancing figure of Lord Nataraja is universally acclaimed to be one of the finest pieces of sculpture, symbolising as it does the three principles of Creation, Preservation and Destruction. Sri J. M. Somasundaram has beautifully summed up the significance of the dance of Siva:

"The images of Nataraja represent Sive dancing. He has four hands and his braided and jewelled hair whirl as he dances. In his hair may be seen a wreathing cobra, a skull, and the mermaid figure of Ganga on whom rests the Crescent Moon, and a wreath of Cassia leaves. He is adorned with necklaces, and armlets, a jewelled belt, anklets and bracelets, finger and toe-rings. He wears a tiger's skin on His loin, and a scarf flutters about Him and the sacred thread is on His Body. The right hand holds a drum, the other is uplifted in the sign of '*Abhaya*'—'do not fear'. His left hand holds fire, the other points down to His feet-the *Kunchita Padam*—the abode

of perpetual bliss. His right foot rests on the back of *Muyalakha,* a dwarf, while the left foot is raised.

"The essential significance of Siva's Dances is threefold" says Dr. A. K. Coomaraswami: "First, it is the image of his rhythmic play, as the source of all movements within the cosmos—which is represented by the arch or *Tiruvaasi.*

Secondly, the purpose of the Dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snare of illusion—and thirdly the place of the dance-Chidambaram—the centre of the Universe, i.e. within the Heart.

Philosophically interpreted, the dance is said to represent the *Panchakritya*—the five-fold activity of the supreme being, Viz.,

"தோற்றந் துடியதனில் தோயுந் திதி யமைப்பில்
சாற்றியிடும் அங்கியிலே சங்காரம்—ஊற்றமாய்
ஊன்று மலர்ப் பதத்தே ஊற்ற திரோதமுத்தி
நான்ற மலர்ப் பதத்தே நாடு".

—உமாபதி, சிவம் உண்மை விளக்கம்—36.

Srishti—Creation, or evolution from the drum; *Stithi*—preservation or continuation from the hand of hope—the *Abhaya Hasta*; *Samhara*—destruction from fire; *Tirobhava,* veiling, illusion or concealment, from the foot held aloft; and *Anugraha* release,—salvation or bestowal of grace from the fourth hand pointing to the lifted foot wherein to seek the refuge of the soul.

These five activities as separably considered are those of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheswara and Sadasiva respectively, and when all these varied activities are blending into one in his dance, the Dance is *Ananda Tandava*—the Dance of Bliss.

It is also said the figure of Nataraja with the *Tiruvaasi* illustrates the *Pranava Panchakshara* letters of ந—ம—சி—வா—ய, the sacred mantra of the Saivites.

The origin of this dance and the Ananda Tandava of Nataraja at Tillai has given the inspiration to the dance poses of Nataraja, which are so common in the temple sculptures here, and in the temples in south India.

"Images answering to the two names Nataraja and Sabhapati, in the Hindu Pantheon, are identical in design. Nataraja (the prince of dancers) is the well-known dancing form of god Siva. It has four arms and a body besmeared with ashes. The back arm on the right side holds the kettle-drum (*Udukai,* as it is called in Tamil) while the other presents the raised palm of protection (*Abhaya*). Of the pair on the left, the upper holds a fire-pot and the lower is bent round across the breast to the right side, its fingers gracefully pointing below, towards the left leg which is raised in a dancing posture. The position of this hand is known as *Gaja-Hasta,* "the elephant-trunk".

The ecstatic and violent nature of the dance, described as Ananda-tandava in the sequel, whirling quickly round on one leg, placed on the back of the demon-Muyalagan or Apasmara, is indicated by the matted hair (*Jata*) stretching out on both sides of the head in wavy lines one above the other and by the cloth, partly tied round the waist and partly thrown over the left shoulder, also flying in the air. The right hand which shows the *Abhaya* has on its wrist a serpent, which is the usual ornament of Siva and may have 1, 3, 5 or 7 hoods. Another serpent, in the hand of the demon below, is explained by Mr. Havell (*Ideals of Indian art*, p. 79) to be the Corresponding wrist ornament on the left arm which had dropped down in the dance. We are told in the *Kasyapa-Silpa* of the *Amsumat-Tantra* that a serpent with raised hood is to be shown playing near Apasmara on his left side, the right hand of the demon pointing towards it (*Vyala-Mudra*). The head of Siva wears peacock's feathers, or an ornament fashioned like them, which is a special characteristic of the image. The aureola (Prabha), which every metallic image necessarily has, is, in this case, somewhat peculiar and significant, being surmounted all round with flames of fire similar to the one which is held in the pot or cup in one of the two left arms of the image. The pedestal on which the figure rests is a double lotus flower placed back to back. Sometimes the *Jataas* are not spread out but are tied and made up in the form of *Jataamakuta*.

Siva is said to dance in the evening in the presence of the goddess Parvati in order to relieve the sufferings of the *Devas*. The dance of Nataraja is believed to symbolize the action of cosmic energy in creating, preserving and destroying the visible universe. The *Puranas* say that during these dances the whole congregation of gods, demigods and saints present themselves to render their obeisance to Siva. Hence the name Sabhapati, " the lord of the assembly " of gods. The asterism Arudra occurring in the bright half of the solar month Margali (December-January) is sacred to Nataraja. All Siva temples celebrate a festival on that ocaasion by taking out in procession miniature representations of Nataraja or, where such do not exist, the chief processional image of Siva. In Chidambaram, of course, where the worship of Nataraja is the most prominent and where the *Sabha-Mandapa* (assembly hall) is covered with gold plate, the festival is the grandest held in the year.

Two main forms of dancing Siva may be distinguished: one with the raised leg as shown in the illustration given above and the other with the same lifted up higher, to the level of the head. The latter is called Urdhava-tandava-a dance which is locally believed to have been first performed by Siva at Tiruvalangadu near Arkonam. The origin of this form of dance is as follows. There was once a dispute between Siva and his consort Kali as to who was better in the art of dancing. Siva danced many a danec and Kali successfully followed him; till at last, in order to suppress her pride, Siva

lifted up one of his legs to the level of his crown and danced on. Kali was too modest to imitate Siva in this performance and she accepted the superiority of Siva. Images of Nataraja are sometimes also seen with a small antelope prancing on his left side near the foot, the Ganga (Ganges) and the crescent decorating the head, the sages Patanjali (with the serpent-body), and Vyaghrapada (with tiger's feet) worshipping on either side and the goddess Parvati standing on the left.

The *Agamas* speak of seven dancing postures of Siva, The first, called Ananda-tandava or the joyous dance, has been described above.

The second is his evening dance Sandhya-tandava. In this form the demon Apasmara is absent and the symbols in the two left arms are the peacock-feathers and the pose of wonder called *Vismaya.*

The third is the Uma-tandava, i e. dance with his consort Uma. In this, Siva has two more arms, the additional right hand holding the trident (*Trisula*) and the three left hands exhibiting the skull, *Vismaya,* and the *Gaja-Hasta.* The left leg is placed on Apasmara and the right leg is stretched towards the left, and the goddess Uma stands on the left side.

The fourth, Gauri-tandava, is almost similar to the first, but in one of the left hands of the God is held a serpent. Nandi stands on the right side and Gauri (Parvati) is on the left.

In the fifth form, called Kalika-tandava, the God has only two eyes, but eight arms. Three of the right arms hold the trident, noose and kettle-drum and the corresponding left hold the skull, fire-pot and the bell; the two remaining arms exhibit the *Abhaya* on the right and *Gaja-Hasta* on the left.

The dance of Siva, with sixteen arms and as many symbols, having Gauri and Skanda on the left and right sides respectively, receives the name Tripura-tandava.

The last dance called Samhara-tandava " the death-dance " shows the God with three eyes and eight arms. The left leg is placed on Apasmara and the right leg is raised. In the right hands are seed the *Abhaya,* trident, noose and the kettle-drum; the left hands exhibit the skull and the fire-pot and the postures *Vismaya* and *Gaja-Hasta.* On the right and left sides respectively are Nandi and Gauri.

Other *Agamas* again, refer to 108 dancing forms of Siva, nine of which are said to be celebrated. Of these later the only one that deserves to be noted is that in which the God has his right leg raised straight up so as to reach the top of the crown-(*Ushnisha*). Perhaps, this is the Urdhva-tandava, described already. He may have four, eight or sixteen arms.

(University environs pp 76—81 and South Indian Images of Gods & Godesses M. Krishna Sastri pp 77—88)

Many are the writings that explain the significance of Siva's Dance and many are the interpretations as well.

It is in the same temple of Lord Nataraja, we find the shrine of Lord Govindaraja in the reclining pose (*Yoga Nidra*). This Vishnu shrine has been built by Pallava Malla Nandivarma (A.D. 717-782); the inscriptions and the *Prabandas* also refer to the fact that he was the builder of the shrine; this is also one of the hundred and eight *Divya Desas* (of Vaishnavaites).

The *Tiru Kama Kottam* or the temple of *Sivakami* is beauitfully situated on the northern side of main temple, occupying a large area. This temple has been built by Kulottunga Chola II (1132-1150); Inside the temple and the *Mantaps* around it, we find many fascinating sculptural pieces of the Chola and the late periods. Next we find the sannadhi of Goddess Durgai; near it is situated the temple of *Shanmugha* (Lord Subramanya) also called *Paandi Nayakam*; built by Maravarman Sundara Pandya (1216-1251). The pillars in this temple are beautified with fine floral designs. The Moolavar, Lord Arumugha is seen with Valli and Deivanai on either side. Opposite to the *Sannadhi*, is situated the recently built Navalinga temple. West of the thousand pillared mantap we find a big tank opposite-*Kama Kottam*; this is the holy *Sivagangai Tirtha*. The magnificent thousand-pillared *Mantap* is said to have descended from the land of Gods-**Deivaloga**. During *Ani* Tirumanjanam and on the Tiruvadirai day in *Margali*, Lord Nataraja is brought to this *Mantap* for abishekam and worship.

The administration of the temple is also unique; the temple belongs to the *Deekshitas* of the place and others cannot interfere in the administration. Once they numbered three thousands and now there are only about 200 of the community and they function as priests in turn, performing the *Poojas* according to the Vedic rites. In ancient literary works, the worship was done according to *Magudagama* rites. There are no landed or other properties to the temple. Though all the *Deekshitas* have the right of offering *Poojas*, they strictly follow a time-table assigning the duty to every one in turn; they meet often to discuss all mtters, concerning administration.

The most important festivals are the *Tiruvadirai* festival conducted in *Margali* and the *Tirumanjanam* in *Ani*; On these occasions Lord Nataraja is taken out of the **Sabha** to the thousand pillared mantap. The *Brahmotsava* takes places as usual for 10 days prior to these two festivals*a* The *Utsava* idol is taken in procession on those days. On four other days also in *Chitrai*, *Avani*, *Purattasi* and *Masi*, *Abishekas* are conducted; Thus *Abishekas* take places six times a year; the *Spatika Linga* installed at the feet of the Lord, is offered poojas 6 times daily.

Numberless are the devotees who have attained *Mukthi* in this *Sthala*, of whom *Manickavasagar*, the author of the famous *Tiruvasagam* was one. It is said that the saint's songs moved the Lord so much that He himself appeared before him to take down all his songs and He is said to have signed and left the *Suvadi* on the steps of the temple. The next day it reached the hands of a devotee who popularised it and the Lord showered His blesing on Saint Manickavasagar and granted him *Sayujya*. It was here too that Nandanar, one of the sixty-three famous Nayanars, born in *Pulay* (Harijan) Community, attained *Mukthi* by his ceaseless devotion to Tillai Nataraja. The *Thevaram* sung by the three Nayanars, was first kept here before it was discovered by Nambiandar Nambi.

It was here again that Tiruneelakanta Nayanar was restored to youth by the grace of Lord Nataraja. The tank that restored the saint to youth is also found along with a separate temple of the Lord in the western direction. Umapathi Sivachariyar (1290-1340) the great philosopher who popularised Saiva Siddhanta lived here, worshipped the Lord and attained *Samadhi* at *Kotravankudi*. The *Samadhi* is found east of the Railway Station. Sekkilar, the composer of the *Periapurana* composed and recited it for the first time here (Arangetram), as requested by Anabaya Chola. It is said that the Lord Himself began the first line of the religious epic, beginning "Ulakelam"

Chidambaram is dedicated to *Akaya* among the *Sthalas* of five elements (Pancha buta sthalas). Thousands of pilgrims visit the city from all parts of India to worship Lord Nataraja. There is a belief that *Mukthi* is attained by birth at Tiruvaroor, by contemplation on Tiruvannamalai, by growth at Kanchipuram, by death at Kasi (Varansi) or by worship at Chidambaram. There are many mutts here and the important mutt of Tamil Nadu have their branches here. Some of the rulers of the later Chola period have been entitled "*Pon Veintha Cholas*" ever since they renovated the Abode of Lord Nataraja; special mention must be made of Kulottunga II (1133-1150) who beautified the *Perambalam*, the great temple Hall, with gold plates, raised the seven-storied tower of the temple, built the temple chariot, and excavated the tank and gifted away cows, bulls and elephants to the temple.

Besides being thus a great religious centre, Chidambaram is also noted as the seat of the Annamalai University, situated at a distance of two miles east of the *Sthala* at Annamalainagar, named after the great philonthropist Raja Sir. Annamalai Chettiar, the founder of the University. In fact the University itself is situated in a *Sthala* called *Tiru vet kalam*. The *Sthalapurana* of this place says that it was here that Arjuna received the *Pasupada* from Lord Siva who appeared before him disguised as a hunter. We find also the temple of *Pasupada* Iswara here. South of Annamalainagar in about a mile, are situated Sivigir (Thirunelvayil) and Thirukkazhippalai two *Sthalas* mentioned in the *Thevaram*.

Large number of pilgrims choose to stay in the mutts found here; a few good hotels are also found. The *Prasada* or the food offerings to the Lord are also available in the temple at cheap cost. The inscriptions of the temple have been published and they give some valuable information about the later Cholas and Pandyas; they give an account of the Nayanars associated with the *Sthala.*

We can reach any part of Madras State from here by bus or train.

Saint Manickavasagar's *Tiruvasagam,* mostly on this place, is the best of religious works noted equally for literary beauty. Dr. G. U. Pope, the great Christian missionary, was so much moved by it that he translated it into English.

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12. TIRUPPADHIRIPPULIYUR

Thiruppadhirippuliyur is the most sacred of all Siva *Sthalas* in South Arcot District. This is situated at a distance of three furlongs from Cuddalore N. T. Railway Station on the southern banks of the river *Gadilam.* It is the headquarters of the South Arcot District.

The place is popularly called Tirupapuliyoor, though *Thiruppadhirip-puliyur* is the correct term. The name is derived from the *Sthalavritcha,* the *Padhiri* tree and also from the fact that Sage Vyakrapada—*Pulikkal Munivar* (the Sage with the feet of the tiger) worshipped the Lord of the place and attainded His blessings. The other names are *Vadapuliyoor* and *Padhiri-puliyoor.* Arunagirinathar refers to the place in his *Tiruppugazh* as *Palavala-nagar.*

The main *Sannadhi* faces east. The temple has one main tower. The Deity is called *Tonra Thunai Nathar* and *Padal Iswarar.* The inscriptions refer to Him as *Tirukkadai Nazhal Udaiyar.* North of the outer *Praharam* is found the Sannadhi of the Goddess. *Tookai Ambikai* or *Perianayaki Amman.* This Sannadhi also faces east. The *Sthalavritcha* is the *Padhiri* tree and there are two *Tirthas,* the Gadilam and the Sivakasa tirtha.

Mahendra, a Pallava King of the Seventh Century, incited by the Jains, persecuted *Tirunavukkarasar.* But the devotee of Lord Siva was not at all harmed by the tortures inflicted on him. At last he was thrown into the sea, with a stone tied to his body. Such was the strength of his devotion to Siva that he used the very stone as a contrivance for floating and singing a song of Siva, he reached the shore near Tiruppadhiripuliyoor. Here is the song he sang;

karruṉaip puuṭṭiyoor kaṭalil paayycciṉum
narrunai yaavatu namacci vaayavee (Appar)

The song provides an internal evidence for the incident and it refers to the torture and the divine help he attained by repeating the *Pancha Akshara Mantra.* This miracle of Appar lends a unique glory and importance to this *Sthala.* The shore which he reached thus floating, is even now called "*Karai era vitta Kuppam*" [The Hamlet that enabled (the one) to reach the shore]. Moreover, there is an annual festival conducted in *Chitrai* on *Anusham* day commemorating the incident; the festival is called "*Vakisar Karai Eriya*" Utsavam.

Appar has sung a song on the Lord of the *Sthala.* He considers the Lord Himself as his Father and Mother for He has brought him back to a new life, *Punar Janma* by saving him at the critical time. The song runs:

iiṉṟaalumaay eṉakkentaiyumaay uṭan tooṉrinaraay
muuṉraa ulakam paṭaittukantaaṉ maṉattullirukka
eeṉraan imaiyavark kaṉpaṉ tiruppaatirippuliyuurt
tooṉraat tuṇaiyaay irun taṉaṉ taṉṉatiyookka lukkee (Appar)

Arunagirinathar also has dedicated a song to the Lord and the *Sthalapurana* was written by *Ilakkanam-Chidambaranatha Munivar.* It shows how *Parvathi Devi* did penance and had *Darsan* of Lord Siva as a big Flame or Jyoti under the *Padhiri* tree, how Sage *Vyakra Pada* worshipped the Lord here, how *Mangana Munivar* was relieved of his sins (he is said to have become a rabbit as a result of a curse on him), how the river Gadilam changed its course to facilitate saint Manickavasagar from south to north and how Appar floated on the sea, though tied to a stone.

There is also a inspiring work called "*Tiruppadhiri Puliyoor Kalambakam*" composed by the poet,—Tolkappia Thevar. The *Irattaiyar* (The twin bets) have also paid tributes to this writing-Kalambakam.

There are also many inscriptions in the temple. They date from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, belonging to the regnal years of Parakesari Varman, Rajaraja, Rajendra, Rajaraja Mahendra, Veera Rajendra, Kulottunga I, and Veera Virupannan, (a ruler of the Vijyanagar Empire). Most of them speak of grants of land and gold for offering *Poojas,* for the upkeep of the temple gardens and for illumination purposes. The inscription dated 1285-1287 of Vikrama Pandiya speaks of the confiscation of temple lands monopolised by some brahmins and shows how the lands were added on to the property of the temple. In the same inscription, there is a reference to Kopperun Singa. In the inscription of Veera Virerppannan of Vijayanagar, there is a reference to *Pushpagiri Mutt,* said to be a branch of the Sankara mutt founded at the time of *Vidhyaranya.*

The Appar festival is conducted for 10 days in *Chitrai*; the *Karai Eriya Ithiha* festival and the Brahmotsava (*Vaikasi*) also are conducted besides all other festivals usually found in Siva temples. On the new moon day in *Thai*, the *Tirthavari* is celebrated on the Sea shore. For *Deepa Aradhana* and *Abisheka* small charges are levied.

There are many choultries here for stay. Recently a few good hotels have sprung up near the Railway Station. We can reach Pondicherry from here by bus and there are other means of transport in the city, like the cart etc.,

13. VIRUTHACHALAM—(MUDHUKUNRAM-PAZHAMALAI)

An the very name of the place suggests, Viruthachalam must be one of the oldest Sthalas in Tamilnad. Muthukunram means the ancient Hill and Virutachalam is the Sanakritised form of the term. This is a junction in Trichy-Villupuram Chort line. There is no hill to be found here as in other places with the suffix " kunram ", however the rock bed of the place suggests its antiquity. The Sthala is situated 1-1/2 miles south of the Junction and half a mile east of the Town Station, nearby flows the Manimutharu.

There are many choultries like the Lord Hyde Choultry, the Reddiar Choultry, the Pasu Matam, the Tivalur pillai choultry, the Vinai thirthan Choultry etc., However there are no good hotels here. As Neyveli situated in about 12 miles from here is becoming popular because of its lignite deposits, this town is also growing in importance. The population is a little above 50,000. This is also a flourishing business centre.

The temple, one of the biggest, covers vast area 660' x 392'; there are four big, seven storeyed towers facing the four directions. On the Southern and northern walls of the East Tower, we find some 76 kinds of Bharatnatya poses carved beautifully. There is a mantap called Viassitta Muniwar mantapam in the temple, east of it, is situated the Agnithirtha, a well. The first prahara is called Kailasa prahara. The chakratirtha is found in the southern corner of the prahara. This tirtha is said to have been formed by Sri Vishnu's Chakra or Wheel hense its name. In the north-west corner of the prahara is the Agama Koil, Lord Muruga is said to have worshipped the twentyeight Agamas here, converting them into a Linga. In the north of the same prahara, we find the temple of Goddess Perianayaki. This Sannadhi has a seven-storeyed tower and the Goddess is also called Virudha Ambikai. We find the Alankara Mantap, Nandhi and the flag-Staff out in front of the temple. North of this temple, there is the shrine of Lord Muruka, (Kukai Muruca). We find also certain other shrines of devotees like Matha Sarma, Anavathini etc. East of them is found the Kubera tirtha.

The Sthala Virucha is the Vanni tree. The purana says that this is the very Kalpaka tree which came to the earth from the Heaven to worship

the Lord. There is a mantap and a dais around the tree and the images of Pillayar, Sage Vibechit, Sage Romesa, Vitharkana Chetty and Kubera's sister are found on the dais. The **Pachalingas** are found in the south parhara of the tree, in the west, the images of Meenakshi, Chockeswara, Kamakchi, Ekambarar, Valli, Deyvanai, Menaka, Jambulinga, Annamalai are installed. On the north eastern corner of the prahara, the Samadhi of Malai *Dhandayuthapani is Situated.*

The Utsava idol of Perianayanar is found in the Isai mantapam (the Music-Hall) or *Alankara* mantap (the ornamented Hall). This idol is taken out in precession only one day in the year during Masi Makam festival. On other occasions it is only the idol of **Chinna Pazha malai nather** that is decorated and taken in procession. The diseased and the infirm get relieved of their sufferings by worshipping Lord **Perianayakar** on Pradhosha and other holy days.

The Sannadhi of Sri Nataraja is situated near the **Isai Mantapam.** Next we find the third inner prahara, called the **Arupathumoovar** prahara. Here we find the Utsava idols and the shrine of Bindu Madhava Perumal also as in Kasi (Varanasi). Hence the name Virudha Kasi and the Sthla is said to enjoy 1/16 part of the Sanctity of Kasi.

In the north of the prahara, the shrine of Ilamai nayaki or **Balambikai** is found. There is a tradition that Goddess Perianaki appeared as Ilamai Nayaki (or a young woman) and fed Guru Namasivaya. There are many mantaps in the inner prahara situated one after another, the Maha Mantapam, the Sthapana Mantapam, the Idaikazhi Mantapam and the Arudha Mantapam. Next we enter the Garba Griha or the **Sanctum sanctorum** where Lord Pazhamalai Nathar is enshirined.

The Sthala purana gives an interesting account of the place. It confirms the antiquity of the Sthala for here it is associated with the very origin of the world. Brahma first created water, it was then that Lord Vishnu killed the Madhu-Kaidapas. Their gigantic detached limbs were floating on the water. He prayed to Lord Siva to bring the datached limbs together and convert them into the earth. Lord Siva appeared before Brahma in the form of a mountain. The God of creation did not understand the Leela of Siva and he began creating many mountains himself but there was no space left for them. Then he understood the manifestation of Siva and worshipped the Mountain and the Lord was pleased with his prayar and then created the world. Then it is that Lord Siva told the Mountains form he assumed was for the good of the world, that it was the holiest and the first of mountains and that those who worshipped the Pazhamalai (the ancient mountain) would attain this Grace.

14. TIRUVANNAMALAI

Tiruvannamalai is a town in North Arcot District, on the Villupuram-Katpadi section of the Southern Railway. Since early times it has been an important Siva *Sthala*. Many are the other names of the place found in the Purana; Some of them are *Mukteipuri, Sthaleswaram, Sivalokam, Suddha Nagaram, Gouri Nagaram, Sonachalam, Sonagiri, Arunadri, Araikari, Tiru Aruna* etc. It is also praised as **Gnana Nagaram.**

The *Sthala* is famous as the seat of *Jyoti* or *Theyu* Linga, one of the five sacred *Lingas*. This is the holiest of *Kshetras*, the very thought of which ensures *Mukthi* to the devotees. The *Rig veda, Puranas, Thevaram* and *Tiruppugazh* pay glowing tributes to the *Sthala*. The Lord is *Annamalaiyar* or *Arunachaleswarar*. The Goddess is Unnamulaiyar or *Abeeta guja nayaki*. The *Sthalavrutcha* is the *Vakula* tree ; it is also said to be the bangan tree.

The very hill found here is worshipped as the *Linga;* it was called *Annamalai* or *"The Great Mountain"*. Being a manifestation of *Agni*, it was said to be red in colour; hence the names *Arunachalam* and *Sonachalam*. There is a tradition that the hill is Lord Siva transformed. Therefore all pilgrims worship the Hill by going round it.

The *Sthalapurana* says that there was once a contest between Brahma and Vishnu; each argued he was greater than the other. Lord Siva who came to know of it took the form of *Jyoti* or Flame of Fire and said that he who reaches either the 'Bottom' (the lower end) or the 'top' (the upper end) of the Flame would be considered great. Lord Vishnu in the guise of a Pig dug out the Earth to reach the 'bottom'; but He could not. Brahma in the guise of a Swan flew up to reach the 'top' and as he was going up saw a *Thazhai* flower falling from the locks of Siva. On being enquired the flower told that it was descending since 40,000 years and nobody could reach the Head of Siva. Thereupon Brahma implored the flower to tell a lie; he wanted the flower to tell Vishnu that he had succeeded in having *Darsan* of Siva's Head! The flower too agreed and did accordingly; and Lord Vishnu promptly accepted defeat; however Lord Siva who was Omniscient understood Brahma's trickery and cursed him and the flower; He cursed that Brahma would have no temple of his own any-where in the world and that henceforth *Thazhai* flower would never adorn His locks. Thus the *Purana* accounts for the absence of Brahma temples in Tamil Nadu; similarly the *Tazhai* flower is never offered to Siva in temples for worship. The day on which Siva became a *Jyoti* is said to be *Sivaratri* and the *Skanda Purana* says that anybody who worships on the day is sure of *Mukthi*.

The *Purana* also says that Goddess Parvathi who did penance to became one with Lord Siva come here to attain the leftern Side of the Lord; after having destroyed Mahishasura. She conducted a big festival in honour of the Lord in the month of Karthikai and saw her consort as a big *Jyoti* on the full Moon Day under the *Kritika* star. Thus the Full Moon Day in Karthikai is the most important day in the temple and a big festival is conducted. Besides one Vayraangatha Pandya is said to have attained the office of Indra by worshipping the Lord. The Lord Himself was born as a son of Vallaala Maharaja who was childless for a long time and prayed for His mercy. There is a festival conducted on the *Makham* day in *Masi* to commemorate this incident.

Arunagirinathar the famous poet who sang the *Tiruppugazh* was born in this *Sthala.* His time is said to be the fifteenth century. As he was once-roaming about disgusted with "the fret and fever" of life, he was bidden by God to sing of Him; (it is also said that God saved Arunagiri nathar who went up the tower and fell from it to kill himself; it was at that time Muruga bade Arunagiri to sing). Arunagirinathar began singing the glories of Lord Siva and Muruga; and thus goes the origin of *Thirupugazh* and other songs of Arunagirinathar.

Lord Muruga also worshipped Annamalai while he was his mission of destroying Soorapadma. Tirugnanasambandar, Tirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthy and Manickavasagar have all sung on the Lord. However, the songs of Sundarar are not available. The *Tiru Empavni* of Manickavasagar was composed here; it is a most moving collection of songs, sung by maids in the month of *Margali*: one of them runs as follows:

uṅkair pillai uṉakkee ataikkalam eṉru
aṅkappalan cor putukkum em accattaal
enkal perumaan umakkoṉ ruraippoom keel
eṅkoṅkai nin anpar allaartool ceerarka
enkai uṉakkallaatu appaṇiyum ceyyaṛka
kaṅkul pakal em kaṇ marroṉrum kaaṇarka
iṅkp paricee emakkeṅkooṉ nalkutiyeel
eṅkelil en naayiru emakkeeloo rempaaraay

(Tiruvaacakam)

After bathing early in the morning the maids recite the songs (in Margali) to obtain suitable consorts in life with the grace of God.

Coming to the temple, we find it is one of the biggest in Tamil Nadu, occupying an area of 24 acres. The sculptures found here are exquisite. The temple is adorned with four towers facing the four directions. The Raja gopura or the Main tower is having 11 floors with 217 feet height. As we enter the temple, we find the thousand pillared *Mantap* on the

right side and the *Sannadhi* of *Kambattu Ilayanar* on the left; Lord Muruka is enshrined here and there is a tradition that He revealed himself in a *Kampam* (Pillar). Nearby we fine the *Sivagangai Tirtha.* The *Paatala Linga Iswara* sannadhi is situated south west of the thousand pillared mantap. The tower of Vallala Maharaja is opposite the huge *Nandi.* North of it we find Lord Muruka who blessed Arunagirinather. The Lord is called *Gopurattu Ilayanar.* The *Sakthivilasa Mantap* is situated north of Vallala Maharaja tower and religious discourses are often conducted in the *Mantap.* On the west of the *Mantap* is *Puravi Mantap* and on the south of it is the Sannadhi of *Kala Bairavar.* Near the Sannadhi there is *Kaala Tirtha.* In the east of the fourth *Prahara* is found the '*Kili Gopuram*' or ('The Tower of the parrot'), it is called so perhaps because of the figure of a parrot found on it; it is also said that Arunagirinathar sang his *Kanthar Anubuhi,* taking the form of a parrot and perching on the tower.

It is in the *Sixteen Pillared Mamtap* next to the *Kili Gopuram* that all the Five Deities of the temple given *Darsan* on *Karthikai* day and the Deities are stationed in the *Mantap* facing the Hill. Opposite the *Mantap* we find *Bharani Deepa Akanda.*

In the third *Prahara* we find the sannadhis of Sambanda Vinayakar, Yogiswarar, Unnamalai, Kalatti Linga Iswarar, Palani Andavar, Ekambarar, Jambulinga Iswarar, the seven *Kanyas* and Sidha Linga; we find also the *Sthala Vritcha Mahila* tree, the *Kalyana Mantap,* and the *Yagasala.* Thus we find all the Deities of the *Pancha Boota sthalas* here. In the second *Prahara* is the *Moolasthana* of *Annamalai.*

There are festivals all through the year in the temple. The poojas are conducted 6 times every day from 7-30 a.m. to 9-30 p.m. The *Brahmotsava* takes place in *Karthikai* for 10 days; the last day of the festival attracts lahks of people to witness the *Karthikai Deepa,* which commemorates the Flame incarnation of *Jyoti* of Lord Siva. Devout Saivites fast on the day until they have darsan of the *Deepa* and worship Lord Annamalai.

It is indeed an inspiring sight to see all the five Deities mounted on Silver *Vahanas* and taken in procession on all the ten days of Brahmotsava The festival of *Arupattu Moovar* is conducted on the sixth day and the silver charriot drawn at night is splendid.

The city enjoys historical importance also; it was under the cholas for some time and in the fourteenth century it passed on to the Hoisalas who had it as their capital. Later the Rayas of Vijayanagar and the rulers of Tanjore had it in succession. In Seventeenth century it passed to the Nawab of Karnataka, and in the next century (1790) to Tippu Sultan. Thereafter it came under the East India Company.

Many inscriptions are found here and most of them have been published, All of them refer to the chequered history of the *Sthala* which came under many rulers and many charitable endowments made to the temple.

There are some caves in the mountain which perhaps have no historical significance. As we go round the mountain, we find the temple of *Adi-Annamalai* in the west and some take it to be the *adi sthala* or the original Annamalai temple. There are 8 lingas (Ashta linga) in the eight directions around the mountain, and more than 360 *Tirthas.*

It is at the foot of the mountain the world famous *Ashram* of Sri Ramana Maharishi is situated. Many ascetics and devout followers or Sri Ramana dwell in the *Ashrama* and in the caves nearby.

Many are the choultries here, divided on a communal basis to facilitate all pilgrims. All amenities are provided for stay in the choultries. Some hotels are also found; it is one of the few *sthalas* in Tamil Nadu where thousands of pilgrims are fed free of cost on festival days; in fact there is a choultry named *Oyamadam* where food is served at all times. We can reach the place from Madras, via *Katpadi* or *Villupuram* easily by train. There are also buses running from Madras straight to Tiruvannamalai. There are good motorable roads from the *sthala* to all nearby places.

Many saints have sung of the *Sthala*; One of the songs of Tirugnana Sambandar runs as follows :

uṉṉaamulai umaiyaaloṭu uṭaṉaakiya oruvaṉ
peṇṇaakiya perumaaṉmallai tirumaamaṇi tikala
maṇṇaarntaṉa aruvittiral mazalai mulavu atira
aṇṇaamalai toluvaarvinai valuvaavaṇṇam arumee

(Campantar)

Here he shows that he who worship Arunachala Iswarar and Unnamulai at Tiruvannamalai surrounded by fertile fields, will be immediately relieved from all bonds of sins.

TANJAVOOR DISTRICT

15. SIRKAZHI

Sirkazhi is one of the *Sthalas* situated north of the Kaveri in Thanjavoor District. The station is on the Madras-Trichy Main Line, between Mayavaram and Chidambaram. The temple is at a distance of half a mile from the station and it can be reached by carts. In the sacred hymns of *Thevaram,* Sirkazhi is often referred to as *Kazhi,* Moreover, there are many other names for the place : they are as follows : *Brahmapuram,* Vengurugu (Brahma and Guru Jupiter worshipped the Deity here) hence the names; *Puhali* (The place

of Refuge; (the Devas took refuge here, persecuted by the Asuras); *Venupuram* (the place of the Holy Bamboo;) (the Lord appeared before Surapadma in the form of a bamboo); *Thonipuram* (the place of the Holy Raft-after the Deluge that destroyed all the worlds, Lord Siva and, Goddess Uma stayed here on a floating raft); *Poontharai* (The Deity was worshipped by Varahamoorthi one of the *Avatars* of Lord Vishnu who Killed Hiranyakshasa after cleaving the earth); *Siva Puram* (The Deity was worshipped by Rahu); *Puravam* (King *Sibi* attained the blessings of *Agni Deva* here who disguised as a dove, tested the King's unswerving sense of justice.) *Sanbai* (Lord Krishna worshipped the Deity and got relived of the sin of having killed his kinsman by means of *Sanbai*, a kind of reeds); Sikazhi (or Srikalipuram-*Kalingam*, the serpent and Goddess *Kali* worshipped the Deity); *Kocchai Vayam* (Parasara worshipped the Deity to get relieved of the slander caused by his union with Machagandhi) Kazhumalam (sage *Romesar* worshipped the Deity to attain *Mukthi*). Thus the *Sthalapurana* accounts for each one of the names ascribed to *Sirkazhi*. Besides, there are also found many other names like *Sanga Nidhipuram, Padma Nidi Puram, Siva Acharya Puram. Parasara Kshetra, Punar Janma Puram, Giripuram, Umapathi puram, Siva Mukthi Puram, Neelakanta Verpu, Maalai Matru Pathi, Jeevan Mukthi Puram, Ezhu Kurrakkai pathi, Linga Atavi, Kuyya Kasi, Mooladhara Kshetra. Etc.,*

The temple is in the heart of the town adorned with four towers. There are separate *Sannadhis* for Brahmapureeswara, Tirumalainayaki, and Tirugnanasambandar in it. All these are facing east. In the big *Mantap* of the Swami temple is found the *Utsava* idol of Saint Sambandar. In the south inner **praharam** Lord Muthu Sattainathar is found; and the sixty-three Saivite Saints are found in the *Tirumaalikai pattu*; Steps are cut above the west and north *Praharas* to reach the small hill. Near the Swami Sannadhi in the *Kattumalai* is found Lord Thoni Appar in the divine form of holding twenty birds. South of the Lord, Lord Sattainathar is found. The two figures are made of lime. This place is called *Tiru Thonimalai.*

Of the twenty two *Tirthas* of the place, *Brahama Tirtha* is the **holiest.** It was on the banks of this holy tank that St. Gnanasambandar was fed with *Divine Milk* by Goddess Parvathi. The other *Tirthas* of the place are as follows: *Kali Tirtha, Parasara Tirtha, Purava Nadi, Virayakanadi, Soola Tirtha, Ananda Tirtha, Vaishnava Tirtha, Raghu Tirtha, Azhi Tirtha, Sankha, Sirkara Tirtha, Agastya Tirtha, Goutama Tirtha, Vanni Tirtha, Kumara Tirtha, soorya Tirtha, Chandra Tirtha, Kethu Thirtha, Anda Tirtha and Pathinen Purana Tirtha.* The *Parijatha* tree is the *Sthalavritcha.* What the purana says of the Sthalavritcha is interesting; it flowers forth like *Konrai* and buds forth like pomegranate; its fruits are like mango; it attains the three powers of

Mantra, (divine charm), *Mani* (wealth or divine grace) and *Marundu* (Remedy); thus ensuring freedom from the bonds of sins, life and body to the worshippers.

The unique glory of the *Sthala* is that it is associated with the boyhood of Saint Tirugnanasambandar. This is the birth place of Saint Tirugnanasambandar. Saint Tirunavukkarasar met him here. Saint Tiruneelakanta played the Thevaram hymns on his *Yazh* accompanying Sambandar. Gananada Nayanar also worshipped the Deity of this place. It is said that Saint Sundara considered himself unworthy of entering the Sthala consecrated by the birth of Sambandar; therefore he is said to have worshipped the Deity from the outskirts of the place. Seraman Perumal Nayanar also has sung of the Lord.

When Tirugnanasambandar was a child of three years, his father *Sivapada Irudayar* came to the tank, for bathing in it, carrying his son on his shoulders; he left the chiid on the bank and immersed in the waters to do *Japa*. The child began weeping when the father did not come up for a long time. It was then that Lord Siva and Goddess Parvathi appeared before him mounted on *Rishaba*. Parvathi, boundless in mercy, gave him a golden vessel filled with milk drawn off from Her breasts. The blessed child was bathed in milk; the father who had finished his *Japa* by the time came up and asked the child who gave him milk; then Sambandar began singing his first song:

too ṭu ṭaiya ceviyaṉ viṭai eerioor
tuu ven mati cuuṭi
kaaṭu ṭaiya cuṭalaippoṭi puucieṉ
ullan kavar kaivaṉ
eeṭuṭaiya malaraal muṉai naaṭpanintu
eetta arulceyta
piiṭuṭaiya piramaapura meeviya
pemmaaṉ ivaṉaṉree

(Campantar)

Thus the three year old child pointed out Lord Siva and Goddess Parvathi and both the father and son saw the divine figures of Siva and Parvathi above. The fortunate father of the blessed child began carrying him ever since on his shoulders and went from place to place worshipping Lord Siva. The child also sang of every Deity they worshipped. He later came to be known as Tirugnanasambandar. In the Saivite religious literature of Tamil Nadu, it is his songs that are ranked foremost for their religious fervour and literary beauty.

Many are the saints and devotees of Lord Siva who were *Born* in this *thala*, worshipped the Deity and attaind His blessings; Some of them are *Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar, Manickavasakar, Poon Thuruthi Nambi, Kada Nambi, Gananatha Nayanar, Nambi Andar Nambi, Sekkilar, Arunagrinathar, Machu Chettiar. Kazhi Gangai Meykandar, Sirkazhi Shitrambala Nadigal, Kannudaya Vallal, Tiruthoniappar, Maraignanasambandar, Arul Nandi Siva Acharyar, Masilamani Desekar,—Chidambara Natha Munivar, Arunachalakavirayar*, etc., All of them have dedicated many songs to the Lord of the *Sthala.*

There are many inscriptions found in the temple of which some forty-six have been published by the Government and only one is left out. They belong to the times of the Cholas, Kopperumsinga and the Rayas of Vijayanagar. One of them speaks of the figure of Aludaiya Pillayar first installed in the temple by *Raja Vichadari*, the eldest of the chambermaids serving Kulottunga III. Another speaks of the gift of gold by one belonging to Gangaikonda Cholapuram for the purpose of raising a wall in the first *Prahara* of the Sambandar Sannadhi. One Potthapi Chola conquered Veera Pandiya, brought the idol of Nataraja to this place and made a gift of it to the temple as a mark of his victory. Many of the inscriptions refer to the endowments of lands for facilitating daily *Poojas* and lighting of the temple. Moreover, we get some information regarding weights and measures of the Chola period; there is a particular reference to a weight known as *Rajarajan Maadai.* There are many references to the festivals and works of renovation carried on from time to time.

Poojas in the temple are offered 6 times a day. The *Brahmotsava* takes place in *Chitrai*; On the second day of the festival is conducted the *Tirumulaipal* function, cammemorating the Tirugnanasambandar episode. Goddess Periyanayaki Ammai is worshipped as the divine Mother who fed *Aludayar Pillai* with divine milk; (Gnana Pal).

Though there are no big hotels for stay here, there are some choultries which cater to the needs of pilgrims. There are bus services from this place to the neighbouring sthalas like *Tiruvenkadu, Saikkadu, Kaveripoompattinam, Chidambaram, Vaithisvaran koil* and *Mayuram.*

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16. VAITHISVARAN KOIL

(Tirup Pul Irukku Velur)

Vaithisvaran Koil is one of the Siva *Sthalas* in Thanjavoor District consecrated by the songs of saints. This is also a *Sthala* of Lord Muruka. The *Thevaram* and other songs refer to the place as *Pul Irukku Velur* or *Velur.* This is situated in Sirkazi Taluq, north of the river, Kaveri. The temple is situated very near to the Railway Station itself known as Vaithisvaran Kovil.

Some of the other names found in the *Sthalapurana* account for them as well; it is called Jataayupuri after Jataayu who worshipped the Lord here. The *Vedas* worshipped the Lord; hence *Vedapuri,*—it is called Kandapuri after Kanda, **Parithipuri** after Soorya (the Sun) Ankarakapura after Ankaraka (Mars), Ambikapuram after Ambikai, all of whom worshipped of the *Sthala.* Some of the more familiar names of the place are Vinai Tirthan Kovil, Thaiyanayaki Kovil and Vaithisvaran Kovil.

The temple is in the heart of the small town, surrounded by big walls of the *Praharas* and adorned with the main tower (the Rajagopuram) and other smaller towers. The temple can be reached by the eastarn and western gates of the towers. There is a small gateway in the south. The temple is surrounded by four big roads and a *Madavilakam.* There are two **praharas** for the temple. The Lord is called Vaidyanathar and His sannadhi faces west. The Goddess is called Thaiyanayaki and her Sannadhi faces south. Bairava in the east, Veerabadra in the west, Karpaka Vinayaka in the south, and Goddess Kali in the north, mount guard over the temple.

The Vembadi mal (or the holy Plain of the Neem tree) is in the east praharam and the Vembu (the Neem tree) the *Sthalaviritcha* is found here. This place is called *Adi Vaidyanatha Puri.* In the south prahara is the sannadhi of the Goddess in which is situated the *Siddha Amrita Tirtha.* There is a beautiful mantap in the middle of the tank and around it are found many *Mantaps* or courtyards.

It was here that Lord Muruga obtained the *Vel* to Kill *Sura.* Selvamuthu Kumaran is said to have inspired Kumara Guruparar here by singing the first line of his *Pillai Tamil.* The Lord is particularly worshipped by all the diseased and those possessed by ghosts and get relieved of their troubles. The Ankaraka or Mars is also a favourite deity of the *thala.* Those suffering from the evil influence of Ankaraka worship the Deity here.

The Netra Pidi Santhanam or the Sandal paste applied to Lord Selva Muthu Kumara is said to be most sacred; *Jatayu Kunda* is the place where Sri Rama did the funeral rites of *Jatayu* according to the latter's wish; and the holy ashes found in the Jatayu Kunda have great powers to cure all diseases. *Tiruchaandhu Undai* is the name of the sacred Santhanam given to the devotees and it is the faith of all devotees that *Lord Vaidyanatha* will cure all who surrender themselves to Him.

There are eighteen *Tirthas* in the temple, of which Siddha amrita Tirtha is the most sacred; it is kept clean and there are no frogs to be seen is the tank. Those who suffer from various diseases come here

throw jaggery and salt into the tirtha, bathe in it and worship the Lord. Some of the other *Tirthas* are Kothanda tirtha, Ganthama tirtha, Vilva tirtha, Munivar tirtha, Anga Santhana tirtha etc.,

Poojas are offered six times daily and *Brahmotsava* is conducted in the month of *Panguni.* On the fifth day of the festival Lord Selva Muthukumara receives *Chendu* from Lord Vaidyanatha and this function is celebrated in a grand manner. There is also a separate festival conducted for Selva Muthukumara in *Tai.* *Abishekas* to the Lord take place in *Karthigai* and *Sashti* days every month. Thousands of devotees throng to worship Selva Muthukumara wearing sandal paste all over (Sandana-kappu) in *Karthikai Day.* During *Artha Jama* the *Puzhu Kappu* is offered to Muthukumara and then to Lord Vaidyanathar. As the Sthala is particularly sacred to Ankaraka (Mars), he is taken in procession around the praharas every Tuseday, mounted on a ram.

There are only a few isncriptions in the temple; belonging to the times of Vikrama Chola (1117 A.D.), Virapandya Acchuthappa Nayak and Tulasamaharaja. They refer to the grants of lands to the temple and other works of renovation.

Many are the saints who have dedicated their songs to this Sthala. Some of them are Tirugnana Sambandar, Tirunavukkarasar, Arunagiri-nathar, Vadukanatha Desikar, Sivagnana Desikar, (the 10th title-holder of the Dharmapuram mutt) Kumara Guruparar, Padikkasu Thambiran, Chidambara Munivar, Kalamega Pulavar, Ramalinga Swamigal and so on.

Of all, the Thevaram of Appar referring to the *Sthala* is the most moving. He gives a detailed account of how The Lord cures all the diseases of living beins. Gems (mani) charms and medicines cure many of the bodily ills. The Lord manifests Himself in all of them and cures mental sufferings as well. Those who do not pray to Him live but in vain. The song is as follows:

peraayiram paravi vaaṉoor eettum
pemmaaṉai pirivilaa aṭiyaark keṉrum
vaaraata celvam varuvip paaṉai
mantiramum tantiramum marntu maakit
tiiraa nooy tiirttarula vallaaṉ taṉṉait
tiripurankal tiiyelat tin cilaikaik konṭa
peeraaṉai pullirukku veeluu raaṉaip
poorraatee aaranaal pokki ṉeeṉee

(Appar)

The *Pillai Tamil*-collection of songs composed by Kumara Guruparar in honour of Muthukumara is equally moving and it is one of the best religious works of Tamil Nadu. The songs where the devotee imagines the Lord as a child and wants Him to play with him and give him a kiss are indeed remarkable in their felicity of expression.

This *Sthala* is situated between Mayavaram and Cuddalore, next to Sirkazhi Station. The temple is just two furlongs from the station. We can reach *Tirupunkoor* from this sthala, which is associated with saint Nandanar. There are bus services to all neighbouring towns. A few choultries and hotels look after the interests of pilgrims.

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17. KUMBAKONAM.

Kumbakonam, flanked by the *Kaveri* and the *Arisilar*, is a beautiful city situated in Thanjavoor District on the Madras-Tiruchirappalli Main Line. The Mahamakham bathing festival held once in 12 years draws lakhs of people to the place. Colloquially known as Kumbakonam, the place is called *Kudandai* and *Kudamooku* in the inscriptions, the *Thevaram* and the *Divyaprabandas*. This is a city of temples both of Siva and Vishnu of which the Sarangapaniswami *Koil*, the Kumbeswarar *Koil*, the Nageswarar koil and the Kasi Viswanathar koil are the most important. They have been referred to in the *Thevaram* and the *Prabandas* of Nayanars and Alwars respectively. The city is noted for its antiquity for it was once the capital of the Cholas (There is a place called "*Cholan Malikai*", 'the Palace of the Cholas' nearby) and judging from the time of the Alwars and Nayanars (Appar and Sundarar) who have paid homage to the *Sthala*, it is concluded that the city was flourishing even before 7th and 8th Centuries, A.D. The *Sthala* enjoys the unique glory of finding a place in the *Pasuras* of Six of the Alwars and Andal.

Other names of the place in Tamil and Sanskrit are Tiruvinnagar, Tiruccherai, Nandipura Vinnagaram, Vanamamalai and Srimushnam. The vessel or *Kudam* filled with *Amrit* by Brahma came here floating on the floods of *Pralaya* and the *Amrit* came out of the narrow opening (strictly *Mooku* or 'nose') of the vessel. Hence the place sanctified by the flow of *Amrit* from the vessel of Brahma came to be called *Kudamooku* or *Kumbakonam*. Surya Deva worshipped the *Sthala*; hence the name *Baskara shetra* also. Besides, this was the place where Lord Vishnu as *Sarangapani* married *Komalavalli*, Goddess Lakshmi. So there is another traditional name-viz., *Kalyanapuram* given to the place.

Sarangapani Koil

The Deity is known by various names like Sarangapani, Sarangaraja, Sarangadharan, Araavamudan etc. The main tower of the temple is an imposing structure 150 feet high with eleven doorways-'tiers' (or 9 gateways). It is noted for the beauty of the sculptures carved on it. There are two entrances to the Perumal *Sannadhi*. One is *Dakshinaya Vasal* kept open from *Adi* to *Margazhi*; the other is *Uttirayana Vasal* kept open from *Thai* to *Ani*. There are two towers or gopuras above the entrances. The Deity or Moolavar is seen facing east in the reclining posture. The *Sayana* is *Udyoga Sayana*. The *Vimana* is *Vaidika Vimana*, looking like a big *Ratha* drawn by elephants and horses. Four wheels are carved for the *Ratha*-like vimana adorned with exiquisite figures. The *Vimana* belongs to the Pallava style of of architecture. The *Sanndahi* of Komalavalli Thayar is situated on the right of the Perumal sannadhi, also facing east. Moreover, there are many other *Sannadhis* like those of *Padala Srinivasa*, *Senai*, Rajagopala Swami, Sri Rama, the Alwars and Andal.

'Potramarai' is the name of the tirtha; it is also called "*Hema Pushkarani*". It was in this *Sthala* that Hema rishi attained the blessings of Lord Vishnu by worshipping him. Big festivals are conducted during the months of *Margazhi*, *Tai* and *Chitrai*. One of the biggest 'cars' ('Theer') of Tamil Nadu, belongs to this temple.

There is an inscription belonging to the time of Sadasiva Raya (1482 Saka) which speaks of the gift of gold to the temple by one Kanaka Chetty for purchase of lands; the income is to be spent on offerings of *Adirasa* ("a sweet meal).

Ramaswamy Temple

This temple was renovated by Govinda Dikshita, a minister of the Nayaks of Thanjavoor. Scenes from the *Ramayana* are painted in glowring colours on the walls of *Praharas*.

The *Chakrapani Temple* is situated at the northern end of the big bazaar.

Kumbeswara Temple

This temple is situared west of Sarangapani temple and it faces east The temple has three towers. The first *Rajagopura* is 128 feet high with 9 tiers. The tower is noted for the beauty of the sculptures carved on it. *Kumbesa Avudayar*, the Moolavar is in the shape of a square; the *Purana* says that it is the form of a divine casket (box) which contained white sands soaked in *Amrit* that flowed from the broken vessel of Amrit. The 'mouth' resembles the narrow opening of the vessel. The Lord is called Amuda Kumbesar, Adi Kumbeswarar and Amudesar.

The figure of Lord Muruka is unique in the temple. He is seen with six faces and six hands.

The Goddess is *Mangalambikai* also called *Mantra Peeda Iswari.* There is another *Purana* which says that Lord Siva disguised as a deer struck the *Amrit-Kalasa* or the vessel of amrit with an arrow. The *Tirtha* found in the temple is *Amuda Pushkarani.* The *Sthalavritcha* is *Vanni.*

The big Mahamakham tank lends a unique glory to this *Sthala.* It is also called *Amuda Saroruham* and *Kanniyar Tirtha.* Every year on the *Makham* day in Masi, Lord Kubeswara and four other Deities of the temple are taken to the *Tirtha* and thousands of devotees take the holy bath. The most famous festival is the Mahamakham coming once in twelve years. (It is colloquially known as the *Mamankham* festival). The latest was celebrated on 1-3-1980. It is conducted on the *Maham* day in the month of *Masi* coinciding with the full moon day when the planet *Gurn* (Jupiter) is housed in Leo (*Simma Rasi*) and Chandra (Moon) is housed in the sign of Aquarins (*Kumbha* rasi); this occurs only once in twelve years. It is on this day that all the holy rivers or *Tirthas* of India, namely the Ganges, the Jumna, the Sarayoo, the Narmada, the Saraswati, the Godavari, the Payodhini, the Kaveri and the Kumari are said to flow into the *Makhamakham Tirtha.* Lakhs of people from all parts of India congregate on the occasion to have the Holy Bath. There are 16 *Mantaps* around the temple. They are said to be built in 1542 by Govinda Dikshita who was a minister of Achutappa Nayakar, the King of Thanjavoor. The sixteen *Lingas* worshipped in the *Mantapas* are *Brahma Tirtha* Iswara, Kukunda Iswara, Dhaneswara, Idapeswara, Baraneswara, Koneswara, Baktikeswara, Byraveswara, Agastyeswara, Vyasa Iswara, Uma Pageswara, Tritiswara, Brahmeswara, Gangadhareswara, Mukta tirtha Iswara and Kshetra Paleswara.

Appar sang in one of his hymns how the various thirthas are mingled in one, in the mahamaham tank on the day,

taavimutal kaavirinal yamuṉai kaṅkai
carasvati porraamarai puṭkaraṇi teṉṉiirk
kooḷiyo ṭu kumarivaru tiirṭtam cuulnta
kuṭantaik kiilk kooṭṭatten kuuttaṉaaree (Appar)

Many saints and *Bakthas* have paid homage to the *Sthala* in their devotional songs. Some of them are Sambandar, Appar, Sekkilar, Murkanayanar, Arnagirinather, Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, Papanasam Mudaliar, Kurukesam Pillai of Jaffna and Saminatha Pillai.

The Nageswarar Temple

This temple is at a short distance in southwest from the Kumbeswarar temple. This is also called *Tirukudandai Kil Kottam*. It is mentioned in the *Tevaram* also. The term *Nageswara is* derived from the fact that Adisesha, the *Naga* or holy serpent, worshipped the Lord here. The names of the Deity are Nageswara, Naganatha, Vilvanesa, Patala Lingesa etc. The inscriptions found in the temple refer to the Lord by various other names such as "*Tirukil Kottatu Paramaswami* or *Udayar* or *Nayanar* or *Pattarakar*; and *Mahadeva* and *Perumanadikal* of Tirukottam. The Goddess is called *Perianayaki*. The *Moolavar* is so situated that on the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth days of *Chitrai* every year, the rays of the Sun are seen falling on the Linga. The *Nataraja Sabha* of the temple is beautiful.

The Kasi visvanathar Temple

This is situated north of the *Mahamakham* tank. The *Thevaram* refers to the same place as *Tirukudandai Kaaronam.*

The someswara Temple

This temple is situated south of the Sarangapani temple, in the east of the *Potramarai* tank. The Lord is somanatha or Sikkesa. The Goddess is Somasundari. Having been worshipped by Vyazha (Jupiter), He is also called Vyazha Somanathar, which name has been transformed into *Elai* Somanathar in course of time. The *Tirtha* is *Soma Tirtha.*

Kumbakonam like Kancheepuram is a place of numberless small temples besides the big ones we have seen. To mention a few of them, there are here the temples of Banapurisa, Eka taimeswara, Adi mukkeswara, *Kanpatta* Viswanatha, Kailasanatha, Ekambareswara, Kaalattiswara, *Karumbayira* Vinayaka and *Brahma.* This is one of the very few *Sthalas* where we have a temple dedicated to Brahma.

All the temples are situated in about a mile from the Railway station. There are many places here with boarding and lodging facilities and there are good motorable roads leading to any part of the town. There are many buses to Thanjavoor from here and also to *Mannarkudi,* noted for the Rajagopalaswami temple. *Pazhayaarai,* the capital of the Cholas for some time, can be reached by bus from this place. *Pazhayaarai* is also a *Sthala* as *Appar* mentions it in his *Thevaram.*

Kumbakonam is a flourishing business centre. It is particularly noted for the manufacture of silk and cotton sarees and clothes and brass vessels,

As the place (the Palace of the Cholas) "*Chola Malika*" is found in a ruined state near the town, Kumbakonam also might have served as a capital of the Cholas for some time.

There is also here the mutt of Sri Sankaracharya of Kamakoti. It was during the time of Maharaj Pratapa Singh of Thanjavoor, that the *Kamakoti Peeda* was transfered from Kancheepuram to this place.

Many of the inscriptions found in the various temples of the town have been codified and published by the *Inscription Research Section* of the State Government in 1908, 1911 and 1915. They are an invaluable source of historical material.

18. TIRUVAROOR

There are two Tamil proverbs which testify the sanctity and beauty of this *Sthala* :

(i) tiruvaaruuril kalutaiyaakap pirantaalum kayilaayam uṇṭu

(palamoli)

(ii) tiruvaaruur Ther Alagu („)

One assures *Mukthi* for anybody born here; the other speaks of the glory of the car or '*Ther*' or the temple. This is a place in Thanjavoor District noted alike for historical antiquity and religious activity. Many Saints have paid homage to it and nuberless are the devotees who attained the blessings of the Lord by worshipping him here and doing penance. Also it is the birth place of many well known religious teachers. Most of the classics in Tamil refer to the place and so it is noted for its antiquity. Appar testifies to the antiquity of the *Sthala* in two passages :

Oruvenaay ulakeetta ninranaaloo
ooruruvee muuvuruvam aana naaloo
karuvanaayk kaalanai mun kaayanthanaloo
kaamanaiyum kaṇṇalalaal viltta naaloo
maruranaay maṇṇum vinnum terinta naaloo
maan marikkai yeentiyoor matoor paakam
tiruvinaal ceervatarku munnoo pinnoo
tiruvaaruur kooyilaak koṇṭa naalee (Appar)

Moreover, this is the place where the *Virat Purusha* first originated, (the *Mooladhara Sthara Virat* of *Purusha*). Of the sthalas dedicated to the five elements, this is *Prithvi Sthala* (The one dedicated to the Earth). The Chola

had this place as their capital for some time. It was here they held their coronation. Parvathi did holy penance here; Lakshmi worshipped here; this is the foremost *Vidanga Sthala* of the seven *Vidanga Sthalas.* The Lord is Thyagesa who is also called *Veethividanga.* It was from here that the famous Chola King, Manu Neethi Chola ruled. He attained the blessings of the Lord by his unswerving sense of justice which he revealed when he drove his chariot on his own only son to award justice to a cow that lost its calf run over by the Prince's chariot.

This place is intimately associated with the life of one of the greatest devotees of Siva, Sundarar. It was here that Sundarar sang his *Tiruthonda Tokai* and it was here too that many of the miracles of his life took place. One of his eyes was restored here and the immeasurable quantities of paddy gifted to him by the Lord Siva of Kundaiyoor was spread over the streets of Tiruvaroor by the Spirits or "Ghost-messengers" of Lord Siva. Some other Nayanars who attained the blessings of Tyagesa are Kazal Singa, Seruttunaiyar, Somasimarar, Tandi Adikal, Tiruneelakanda Yal Panar, Naminandi Adikal, Viranmintar and *Eyarkon Kali Kamar.* All the great religious classics like the *Thevaram,* the *Tiru Isaippa,* the *Tiruvasagam* and the *Periapuranam* speak the glory and sanctity of Tiruvaooor. Besides, there are ever so many separate songs dedicated to the place by various poets. It is said the *Thevaram* has the largest number of songs in all the *Seven Tirumuraaikal* dedicated only to this *Sthala.*

The inscriptions found in the place refer to as *Tiruvaroor* in *Athiraja Vala Nadu, Kshatriya Sikamani Vala Nadu* and Jaya maanikka Vala Nadu. The name 'Tiruvaroor' is a combination of "*Tiru Ar ur*" which stand for *Prosperity* (wealth) *Beauty* and—*Excellence.* The *Puranas* refer to it as *Kamalaalayam, Sripuram, Veethi Vidangam, Adakeswaram, Kali Sela Nakam, Sakthipuraam, Samatkara Puram, Deyayagapuram, Devasrayam, Musukundapuram* and Mulathaara nagavam.

The Tyagaraja temple is one of the biggest in South India. It occupies an area of five *Velis* (nearly 30 acres). It has three *Praharas* and seven towers. Rajaraja Chola is said to have built the Big Temple of Thanjavoor in the 10th century, after being inspired by a sight of the Tiruvaroor Temple. The *Sanka Tirtha*-(a well) of the place is an effective remedy for all diseases. The stone-car of the temple is really a remarkable piece of achievement. The *Leelas* or miracles of Lord Tyagaraja are numberless. There are many *Puranic* legends which refer to them and to the faith that mere *Birth* in the *Sthala* assures one of *Moksha*

The temple must have been built before the temple at Thanjavoor. It faces east. As we enter the eastern gate, we first see *Brahma Nandi.* It is said that water-famine would be removed if water is poured and allowed to

remain on all sides of this Deity. In the first western prahara we see the Chitra Saba or Sabapathi *Mantap*; the colourful paintings in the mantap are enjoyable. During the *Panguni Uttiram* festival, if the '*Ther*' or Car reaches the original place after going round once before the *Uttira Pada* ends, then the *Utsavar* Tyagaraja Swamy is taken to this *Mantap* for *Uttira Tirtha*.

In the northwest corner beyond the *Mantap*, is situated the temple of *Kamalambikai.* It is considered to be one of the *Peedas* dedicated to Goddess *Parasakthi.* The *Sannadhi* faces *Isaaniya* or north-east. *Goddess Kamalambikai* is seen seated in *Yogasana* rapt in contemplation. In the south *Praharam* of this temple the **Akshara Peeda** is found; there is one *Peeda* beside a *Tiru-Vakshi* on which we find fifty *Aksharas* or letters with divine significance carved. In the northern *Prahara* wefind the *Sannadhi* of *Ottu Thyagar.* Viranminda Nayanar forbade Sundarar from entering the temple; when the latter was filled with agony not seeing the Lord, Tyagaraja is said to have appeared before him in this place. Here too we find the *Sthalavrittcha,* the *Paadiri.*

In the north-eastern corner of the outer *Prahara,* we find the thousand-pillared mantap, called *Devasiriya Mantap.* Sekkilar refers to the glory of the mantap in his *Periapuranam.* This is also called *Rajathani Mantap.* The *Mahabisheka* of Lord Tyagaraja is conducted here after the Car-festival comes to an end.

As Soon as we enter the second inner prahara, we see another beautiful *Mantap* called *Rajanarayana Mantap.* On *Uttiram* (*Panguni*) and *Tiruvadirai* (*Margali*) days the Deity is taken to this mantap for worship. In the south second inner prahara we find a separate *Sannadhi* mentioned in the *Thevaram-Tiruvaroor Araneri.* Saint Appar has sung two songs on this *Pathi* or the presiding deity of the *Sannadhi.* The names attributed to this Lord are *Araneri Appar,— Achaleswarar* and *Akhileswarar.* An inscription calls Him Araneri Alwar. The Goddess is *Vandu-Ar-Kuzhali.* This *Sannadhi,* a massive stone-structure, was built by Chembian Maadevi, the wife of Kandaraaditta Chola. It was here that Naminandi Nayanar did the miracle of lighting the lamp with the water of *Devatirtha* for want of oil. This incident is mentioned by Tirunavukkasar. *Kazhal Singa,* (a Pallava King) was once going round this *Prahara* with his wife. She took up a flower lying on the floor of the *Mantap* and smelt it; Seruttunai Nayanar who was worshipping Lord Vishnu here saw the Queen doing so and he was angry at this act of impiety; Immediately he is said to have cut off her nose; the King who was not satisfied with the punishment given, is said to have cut off her hand too! The Lord appeared then before His ardent *Bakthas.*

In the same *Prahara* we see the *Sannadhi* of *Adakeswara* also. Here we see Siva Linga with the Goddess. In the second prahara of the west, we find the temple of Anandeswara. There is a reference to this temple in a book called "*Tiruvaroor ula*". In the second prahara of the north is situated the Viswakarmeswarar Temple. From here we can see and worship the seven towers. There are many other deities (Lingas) in the temple.

The *Vanmeeka Nathar Sannadhi* is situated on the way leading to the innormost *Prahara* from the second *Prahara*. The *Alagian Tower* leads to the Sannadhi. Some of the other names of the Lord are "*Putril Kondar*", *Tirumoolasthana Nathar* etc., The Thevaram refers to the Sannadhi as *Thirumoolathanam* and "*Poon Koil*".

"The inscriptions also speak of the place as *Tirumooltatanam*. On the right to the Sannadhi we find the Sannadhi of Soma Kulambikai also called *Piriya Vidai Ammai*.

The Sannadhi of Lord Tyagaraja is situated south of Vanmikanathar Sannadhi. It is this Sannadhi that is held Supreme in the *Sthala*. The religious classics of Tamil Nadu are full of of devotion to the Lord who is called by various names suggesting His glory and powers. Some of them are as follows: "*Asaindu Adiya Peruman*" ("The Lord who Dances",) "*Adikku Ayiram Pon Alippavar*" (The Lord who gives 1000 pieces of gold for every measure), "*Arumai Perumal*" (The Unique Lord); "*Ratna Singadana pathi*" (The Lord on the throne of Jewels), "*Irun taadu Alagar*" (The Beautiful Lord who Dances), *Andiyum Sandiyum Aduvar* (The Lord who dances both in mornings and evenings) *Kambi Kadu Alagar* (The Lord with beautiful ear. rings), *Karunakara Tondaiman* (The Merciful Lord of Tondainadu), *Kanaka Tyagesar* (The bejewelled Lord of Sacrifice), *Kinkini Kalazhakar* (The Lord with beautiful feet adorned with *Chadangai*) *Chengalu Nir Thamar*, *Chembon Singadhanpathi*, *Sevvandhi Tottalagar*. *Tyagachintamani*, *Tyga Perumal*, *Tiruvandi Kappalagar* and *Vallal Veethi Vidanga Perumak.* Musukunda, a Chola King, is said to have founded the temple as the foremost of the seven *Vidanga Kshetras.* Near the Lord is seen the Goddess called '*Kondi*'. Appar sings of Her as :" 'Kantu Kantiaval Katalittanpataik Konte ayinavaru Kootaiyee'. The Siva Linga made of emerald here is called *Veethi Vidangar*. The Dance of Tyaga raja is called *Ajapa Natana*. We find the *Sanku Tirtha*, Vani tirtha and *Mukthi Kinaru* in the temple. The holiest *Tirtha* is the **Deva tirtha**, otherwise known as Kamlayaya Tank outside the temple, one of the biggest tanks, occupying an area of 5 *Velis* (Thirty acres near the temple). It was this Holy water of this tank that Nami Nandi Adigal used for lighting the lamp. Dandi Adikal Nayanar, a born-blind saint was once engaged in the task of deepening

and widening the western part of the *Tirtha*; it was then his—eyesight was restored and those who stood in his way were struck blind; hence the other name of the Nayanar: "*Natta Miku Dandi Adikal*". Sundarar is said to have immersed in the tank and brought out the gold thrown into the Manimuttar River at Tirumudhu Kunram. This he did in the presence of Paravaiyaar, his wife. Vinayaka, the Lord who also tested the gold on a touch stone and proved its worth, is found in a Sannadhi raised on the steps of the tank; The name of Vinayaka is "*Matru Uraitta Vinayaka*".

The most important festival is the *Panguni Uttiram*. The car festival also is equally famous; hence the saying:

"tiruvaaruurtteer alaku"
"ettaṉai naal pirin tiruppeen
eṅ aaruur iraivaṉaiyeen"—

The story of Manu Neethi Chola lends a unique importance to this *Sthala*. Sekkilar gives a detailed account of him to bring out the King's sense of justice, The poet concludes the narration saying that all rulers in the world should follow him in his footsteps. The passage where the poet pays a tribute to his sence of justice and administation is as follows:

'Oru maintan tan Kulatuk kullan enbatai unaran, taruman tan Voili celkai Kata nerru tan maintan, marumam tanterrali ura urritan manuvantan, arumanta arsattci aritoo marrelitoo tan.

Almost all the old classics of Tamil speak of the glories of Tiruvaroor. The *Silappadikaram*, the *Moovarula*, the comments of *Parimelazhakar*, Proverbs of Tamil Nadu, Arisamaya Deepam—all these contain references to the place. Moreover, we find particular works dedicated solety to the *Sthala* as the following: The sacred songs of Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar and Manivasagar, the Tiruvaroor Puranam of Sambanda Munivar, the *Kamalaaya Chirappu* of Maraignana Sambandar, the *Tyagaraja Leela* of Minakshisundaram Pillai, the *Tiruvaroor Mummani Kovai* of Cheraman Perumal, the *Tiruvaroor Nal Mani Malai* of Kumaraguruparar, the *Tiruvaroor Panmani Malai* of Vaidyanatha Navalar, the *Tiruvaroor Kuravanji* of Kamalai Gnanaprakasar, the *Tyagappallu*, the *Tiruvaroor Ula* of *Andak Kakavi* Veera-raghava Mudaliar, *Tiruvaroor Kovai* of Saiva Eallapa Navalar, the *Tiruvaroor Oru Turai Kovai* of Kilvellore Guruswami Desikar, the *Tiruvaroor Rattai Mani Malai* of Sadasiva Desikar etc., The—*Tiruppugal* of Arunagirinathar, the *Periapuranam* of Sekkilar, the Kandapurana of Kachiappar also particularly contain references to the Sthala among other things. One of the verses of Sundarar where he sings of the Lord at Tiruvaroor miles away from him on his travels, is really most moving, steeped as it is, in profound devotion and pathos. ('பக்தியையும் அடிமையையும்' என்ற பதிகம்)

There are many inscriptions here in Tamil, Grantha and Kanarese They belong to the times of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Rayas of Vijayanagar, the Nayaks and the Mahrattas. Most of them refer to endowments of lands and other charities to the temple for *Poojas* and lighting arrangements. Some inscriptions which are important speak of Manu Neethi Chola and Chembian Madevi who built the Araneri Temple. One Poon Koil Nambi is said to have written a book called "*Neera Anukka Vijayam*". Another inscription says of the gift of lands to those who recited the *Thevaram* and another speaks of fifty six festivals conducted during a particular year. Yet another inscription refers to one Nagarajan who built the South tower. We also understand from an inscription that *Isai Gnaaniyar*, the mother of Saint Sundarar was the daughter of *Gnana Sivachariar* who lived at Tiruvaroor.

The town is a junction situated on the Mayavaram-Aranthangi line; there are many good motorable roads leading to the city from Nagapatnam, Mayavaram, Tanjore and Karaikkudi. There are many buses to all parts of Tamil Nadu from here; however there are no facilities for stay at Tiruvaroor but for a few choultries.

19. THIRUVAIYARU

Tanjovoor District is well known by its great temples. Thiruvaiyaru, one of the important pilgrim centres in the District, lies at a distance of eight miles to the north of Tanjore town on the left bank of the sacred river Cauvery. Nayanmars Tirugnanasambandar, Tirunavukkarasu and Sundaramoorthy have sung in praise of the Lord of this temple. It is in this place Tirunavukkarasu Nayannar had the sight of Kailas shown to him by God. The grand sight of Cauvery at this place, the large trees in exuberance on its banks and green and luxuriant vegetation throughout the place, have come up for mention in sacred hymns, This holy place is called by a number of names Ayyaaru, Panchanadam, Bhooloka Kailas etc., Ayyaru or Panchanadam is taken as representing the five great waters Suryapushkarani, Chandrapushkarani, Gangathertham, Palaaru, and Nanditheertham.

Though there are many holy places on the banks of the river Cauvery, the fact that the exponents of Saivism have named this temple alone as Cauverikkottam evinces its special greatness.

This is the chief of Saptha Sthalams. This temple has Panchaprakarams. There are separate shrines for the Lord and the Goddess Mother, both facing the east. In the second roundway, Somaskanda has got a separate shrine with Japesa mantap by its side.

South Kailas :

This is a stone temple situated in the southern roundway of the temple of Ayyarappar, consisting of three parts, namely Ardhamantap, Mahamantap, and the tabernacle, and surronnded by a set of storyed buildings. The image of the saint Appar presents a beautiful appearance here. This temple was renewed by Panchavanimadevi, the wife of Rajendra Chola I. The name of the Lord is Panchanad vaanan and that of the Goddess Mother is Anjalai.

North Kailas :

This is also called Olokamadeechaharam. This temple is situated in the big roundway in the north. It was built by Olokamadeviar, the wife of King Rajarajan I. This King ascended the throne in 985 A. D. So it may be taken that this woman also should have lived at this time. The stone inscription found in the 21-st year of the reign of Rajarajan I, is the oldest available in the temple. So this temple should have been built before 1006 A.D. Thus it should have come into existence nearly 970 years ago.

Subramaniyam :

Unlike in other temples, Lord Murugan appears here with bow and other weapons of war in his hand, He is called Danusu Subramaniam.

Ayyaarappar :

The presiding Lord here is Panchanadiswarar or Ayyaarappar. It is Swayambu. He is also called as has been described by eminent devotees Semporjotheeswarar. In the Tirumurais, He is named Ayyarudaya Adigal and Also Ayyatrin-perumman. The puranas describe him as Kailasanathar, Japesar, Pranatarthi harar etc.

Goddess Mother :

She goes by various names Sri Aramavalarta Nayaki, Tripurasundari, Dharmambigai etc.

Dakshinamurthy :

Holding a skull in the right hand which points upward and chinmudra in the other which points downward, and having a trident in the left hand which points upward and Sivagnanabodham in the other which points downward. He appears having a tortoise under his foot. Trampling the the tortoise under the foot shows the indispensability of controlling the senses He is called Harigurusivayoga Dakshinamurthy. Great sienificance is attached to this Murthy.

Dandapani Shrine :

This is situated in the hundred pillared mantap by the side of the Rajagopuram in the outer roundway.

Aalkondar :

He stands on the right side of the tower on the southern entrance. In his presence a kind of incense called Kungilium is always being burnt. He puts up a sort of heroic appearance with Yama lying down under his feet.

Sucharitha, a young brahmin, overcome by sorrow upon the death of his parents, left the banks of the river Goutami undertaking a pilgrimage and on his way arrived at Tiruppazhanam a place near by Tiruvaiyaru, and when resting there for the night in his dream Yama appeared and warned him that he had only five more days to live. He reached Tiruvaiyaru frightened but with the thought of praying to God for saving him. There he worshipped. Vashista instructed him in the Panchakshara japa and he began doing worship and japa to the best of his ability. On the fifth day Yama appeared. Vasishta also prayed to God for the sake of the boy. God was so pleased with the prayer that He sent his guards to keep him away from Yama. Yama put up a fight with them. Then God appeared, punished Yama and then blessed Sucharitha, granting him long life. Sucharitha then by God's direction married and lived as a house-holder with children for long and attained salvation at the end. God revived Yama too and warned him not to bother the devotees living in this holy place. God in the form in which he appeared to save Sucharitha is called Aalkondesa.

Here it is Proper to mention that this Thiruvaiyaru is the birth place of the famous musician, Saint Thyagaraja who wrote thousands of kirthanas in Telugu.

Holy Waters :

There are many holy waters in this place such as the river Cauvery, Suryapushkarani, Chandrapushkarani, Samudratheertham, Devamirta Theertham, and Nandi theertham. Suryapushkarani is the Sivatheertham east of South Kailas.

The bathing ghat in Cauvery here is very important. The benefit that can be obtained by bathing for one year in other bathing ghats in Cauvery can be got by bathing for a day in this place.

The bathing ghat here is called Poosa mantapa thurai. This is the place where god blessed Saint Appar with a sight of Kailas.

Puranic Acccount :

THE LORD WORSHIPPED HIMSELF :

Of the 24 Adi Saiva Archakas of Ayyarappar one went on pilgrimage to Benares. During his absence the other Archakas encroached upon his properties and rights. His helpless wife and sons sought refuge at the feet of the Lord Ayyaran the Presiding God here. God stepped in the form of an old Archaka and carried on the duties of the absentee Archaka at the temple. When the original archaka returned from the pilgrimage, the divine substitute sportively sought to prove the former an impostor, and when the astonished judges gave him the victory, He suddenly transformed himself into his divine form and blessed the devoted group. Following the tradition, on the 5th day of the annual festival this puja is performed.

A crystal Linga in Somaskanda Mantap still bears witness to this traditional story.

Tirunandi Devar :

Sage Silada, having no son, worshipped the Lord. He got a command from God to perform the Putrakameshti sacrifice and he was given to understand that a child placed in a box, would be found by him while ploughing the sacred ground and that he would live up to an age of 16 years. Silada performed the sacrifice and discovered a box. When he opened the box eagerly, what met his eyes was a divine form with four arms and three eyes with moon on the crest. Immediately a voice was heard from above instructing him to shut the box and then open the same. He did so. And lo! what he found inside was an ordinary human child. The child was given the name of Japeswara. The boy grew up and before he was forteen years old had mastered all the Vedas, Agamas, and the Sastras. The parents became sad to think that he had only two more years to live and on coming to know the reason of their sorrow, Japeswara went to Ayyarappar temple, began to perform a severe penance, posting himself in the Brahma theertha. Though the aquatic reptiles and the fish in the water fed themselves upon his flesh and he was reduced to a mere skeleton, he continued his penance unaffected. God then appeared before him, sprinkled on him the five waters, restored his body to its original unimpaired condition and also blessed him with the traditional sixteen gifts. Japeswara then married Svayamprakasa the grand daughter of Vasishta, the daughter of Vyagrapada and the sister of Upamanyu in the month of Panguni, when the punarpoosa constellation was ruling. Finally Japeswara received the Upadesa of the Lord, ascended to Kailasam and became the head of the attendants on Siva. He obtained the honour of guarding the main gate there and became the prime founder of the line of Saiva Acharyas. He bears the name of Nandi Devar. His Tirukal-

yanam is being celebrated even today during the month of **Panguni on a** grand scale at Tirumazhuvadi a village close by.

Agastya :

Agastya came to this holy shrine bathed in the Suryapushkarani and performed penance. God appeared to him mounted on the bull. Agastya prayed for a short statured form for facilities of worship at God's feet. This being granted Agastya became short of stature. He then wished to see Kailas, God imparted to him the Panchakshara Manthra and bade him plunge into the Suryapushkarani. Agastya emerged at Kailas and stayed there.

Goddess Mother :

In order that the people may know the greatness of the mother, the Lord here bade her perform all the charities with only two measures of paddy granted to her as the means. The mother gladly accepted the quantity so provided for the charities and through the exercise of her unlimited mystic powers carried out all the 32 kinds of charitable acts for the benefit of the devotees. She was thenceforth known as Aramvalarta Nayaki.

MANTAP :

Salvation Mantap (Mukthi Mantapam) :

This kind of mantap is found only in three places. Those are Nagapattinam, Thiruvaiyaru and Benares. In this place, this mantap is called Sabesa mantap. Great sanctity is attached to this mantapam. The spiritual benefit and efficacy of Panchakshara japam when proounced in this mantapam is stated to be ten times as much as that when done anywhere else. This is otherwise called Mukthi Mantapam.

Festival Mantap :

There are separate mantaps in the temple of the Lord and in that of the goddess mother. Apart from these, there are the Asthana mantap and the Prasanga sabha mantap. The sokkattan mantap is in the Sannidi of Ayyarappar.

Festivals:

The main festival which extends over 12 days, takes place in the month of Chittrai. The fifth day festival is very important, as on that day, the Lord transforms Himself into a saiva acharya and worships Himself. It is on that day itself that maheswara pooja is done.

Seven Temples Festival (Saptasthala Festival) :

The grand and note worthy feature of this place is this being the chief of Sapthasthalams. Lord Ayyarappar starts in procession along with Goddess Aramvalartha Nayaki, Nandi and Swaymprakasa Ammai and after visiting Tiruppazhanam and six other holy places where He is honoured and worshipped, returns along with the deities of the said places to Ayyaru next morning. This festival falls on the full Moonday in the Tamil month of Chittrai. This festival is performed every year and a large number of people participate in it.

Monthly Festival :

On the new Moon day of every month Lord Ayyarappar comes on in procession in the streets, and is taken to the pushpamantap ghat of the river cauvery where he bestows his grace on the people that take holy bath in the cauvery river at that time.

The Thirukkalyanam of Tirunandi Devar takes place in the month of Panguni each year at Thirumazhapadi. Lord Ayyarappar along with Aramvalarta Nayaki goes to Thirumazhapadi to grace the marriage.

The Six other holy places in the order of Saptha Stalam.

Tiruppazhanam :

This place is at a distance of two miles east of Thiruvaiyaru, on the road leading to Kumbakonam. Tirunavukkarasu Swamigal has sung in praise of Appoodi Adigal in the Thevaram of this place. The name of the Lord here is Apatchayar and that of the Goddess is Perianayaki.

Tiruchchotruthurai :

This was the hermitage of the sage Goutama. Indra, Surya and others worshipped the Lord in this place. A brahmin bhaktha named Arulalar was blessed with the gift of Akshaya patram in this place, This is at a distance of 1½ miles to the south of Thiruppazhanam ; the river cauvery and its other tributaries have to be crossed. The name of the Lord here is Tolayachchelvar and that of the Goddess Mother is Oppilavammai.

Tiruvedikudi :

This is one of the holy places worshipped by the Vedas. The Vinayakar here, is called Veda Vinayagar. This place is at a distance of 2 miles to the north of Tiruchotruthurai. The name of the Lord here is Vedapuriswarar and that af the Goddess is Mangayarkarasi.

Tirukkandiyur :

This is two miles west of the last mentioned temple. This is one of the eight holy places, (Ashtaveerattanam). It is in this place that God removed one head of Brahma. In this temple there is a shrine for Brahma which is a pecularity of this place. Tirugnanasambanda Swamigal and Tirunavukkarasu Swamigal have sung about this place. Sadannandar worshipped the Lord here and attained salvation. The name of the Lord here is Veeratteswarar and that of the Goddess mother is Mangalanayaki.

Tiruppoonturuthi:

This is two miles west of Tirukkandiyur. Indra, Kasyappar, and Cholan worshipped the Lord here. It is said that in this place, Nandi moved from his place to give way for darasan to Thirugnanasambandamoorthy. Thirunavukkarasu Swamigal had built a mutt here and lived in it. It is here that Thirunavukkarasu Swamigal bore the palanquin of Thirugnanasambandamoorthy Swamigal when he returned from Pandinadu. The name of the Lord is Pushpavana nathar and that of the Goddess mother is Azhaharnda Nayaki.

Tirunaithanam :

This is the place where goddess Saraswati worshipped the Lord. It is at a distance of a mile to the west of Thiruvaiyaru. The name of the Lord is Naiyadiappar and that of the Goddess is Valambigai. This place is now called Tillaisthanam. During the Sapthasthanam festival Ayyarappar visits this place last and then goes back to Thiru Ayyaru.

Sculpture at Tiruvaiyaru Temple.

The sculptures of this holy place belong to a very early era. The image of Brahma here is a very beautiful one. Aalkondar the guard of this place and Yama under his foot are also beautiful images instilling into the the minds of the devotees, a sense of both heroism and fear. Research scholars of sculpture say that the sculptural works seen on the outer wall of the tabernacle in the South Kailayam appear to be the handicraft of the Chalukyas in the Deccan and that similar works of the same type are found at Hemavati in Anantapur District.

Antiquity and Structure :

The antiquity of a temple can be determined by examining the structure, the pillar, the images and such other things. The foremost of sculptures are the Pallava sculptures. In the cut temple at Mamallapuram the image of the gate guard is seen with slender waist and two hands bending the head a little. Wherever such an image is seen it can be concluded that it

is as old as the former. The Gate guard at the gate of the temple of Ayyarappar at Tiruvaiyaru, stands with two hands. From this it can be guessed that this temple might have been built by the Pallavas. The temple of Somaskandar and the gate guard with four hands and crooked teeth exhibit the Chola civilisation.

Antiquity :

According to a divine command through a voicc from above, Priyavrata a king of the solar race first constructed the temple in this holy place. The great warrior king Karikar Peruvalathan who had extended his sway upto the Himalayas effected repair works next in this temple. In obedience to the mandate of God, Vimaladithan of Venginadu renewed it again. Olokama devi, the wife of king Rajaraja I, built the North Kailayam and gave it her name. From these facts it is evident that this holy place with its temple has been under the protection and patronage of the kings of the land. This temple is noted for historical interest and sculptural importance. (Dharmapuram Adheenam Publication 309).

TIRUCHIRAPALLI DISTRICT

20. TIRUCHIRAPALLI

Tiruchirapalli is one of the important cities of Tamil Nadu, situated in the middle of it. Besides being a historical and religious centre, it is one of the major junctions on the Southern Railway. The place is situated on the southern banks of the Cauveri; it is one of the places existing from ancient times and still flourishing. *Uraiyoor*, a part of Tiruchy was the capital of the Cholas during the Asoka period, *Sangam* period (Ist century A.D.) and the later epic period; though there is no reference to Tiruchy as such in the Sangam and epic literature, we find it flourishing as a *Kshetra* during the Pallava period; perhaps Tiruchy was a suburb of Uraiyoor in ancient times.

On the northern side of the Cauveri, Srirangam, the famous *Vaishnava Sthala* and Jambukeswaram (Tiruvanai Kaval) a *Siva Sthala* are situated. All the places are well knit by good roads and Railway; actually it looks as though both the southern and northern cities form together a big city and no visitor to Srirangam misses to pay a visit to the Siva temple at Tiruchy.

The temple of the city is situated on the Hill in the heart of it. On the top of the hill which can be reached by steps cut out on it, we find the *Ucchi Pillayar* temple. Midway is situated the temple of Lord Siva. As the place has the suffix of *Palli*, it is said that the temple was once a place of worship for the Jains which later came to be a Siva *Sthala*. However we find the

Thevaram of Sambandar and the inscriptions of Mahendra referring to the Sthala and so it was a Siva Sthala during the seventh century.

Some of the other names of the place are *Tiri Sira Malai*, *Muttalai Malai* and *Brahma Giri.* The *Purana* says that the *Sthala* is named after an Asura, Tirisaran, who worshipped the Lord here and attained *Mukthi*; also as there are *Three 'Peaks'* or summits of the Hill enshrining Siva, Parvathi and Pillaiyar respectively, place came to be called *Tirisira Puram* or *Muttalai Malai* (The Three peaked mountain).

The *Sthala* is also famed as *Then Kailayam* or South *Kailas*. The Sthalapurana says that there was a contest between *Vayu Bagavan* (The God of Winds) and Adi Sesha (The Holy serpent of Lord Vishnu) as to who was valient. Adisesha entwined Mount Kailas and Vayu tried his best to shake the mountain; there three drops of perspiration scattered from his body and flew to the south; one fell down at Kalahasti (Andhra Pradesh), another at *Tirukonamalai* (Trincomalee-Ceylon) and the third drop here. Thus the three *Sthalas* came to be called *Dakshina Kailaya*; being in the middle, Tiruchy is considered to be the most sacred.

The Lord is called *Thayumanavar* (The One who became a Mother). The name is derived from the Purana that God Himself attended a delivery as the mother of a woman belonging to *Chetty* Community. *Ratnagupta,* a merchant of Kaveripumpattinam gave his daughter Ratnavathi in marriage to one Danagupta, another merchant living at Tiruchy. Rathnavathi's mother was on her way to Tiruchy to attend on her daughter during confinement; but she could not reach her daughter's house in due time for the Cauveri was in floods. In the meanwhile Ratnavathi, who was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva, longed for her mother and prayed Lord Siva for her arrival. Moved by her prayer, the Lord Himself appeared in time as the mother of Ratnavathi, attended the delivery and gave her the required medicines. After some time arrived the mother when the floods declined. Ratnavathi was puzzled and confused when she saw her real mother and she wondered which of the two was her mother. The Lord immediately vanished and gave *Darsan* to His devotee with Parvathi. Ever since, the Lord is called *Thayumanavar*.

Some three hundred years ago there was one Kediliyappa Pillai (of Vedaranyam) serving Vijaya Ragunatha Chockalinga Nayak at Tiruchy. The Pillai was a great *Baktha* of Thayumanavar and he named also the son born to him as Thayumanavar. It is this son who later became an ascetic, received the *Mantro Padesa* from *'Mounaguru'* at Tiruchy and composed many sacred hymns; the best song of his is:

paṉṉeen uṉakkaaṉa puucai yoruvaṭivilee
paavittiranca aaṅkee
paarkka malaruuṭu niiyee irutti ap
paṉi mala reṭukka maṉamum
naṉṉeen alaamal iru kaitaaṉ kuvikka eṉil
naaṉum eṉ ulam nirri nii
naaṉkump iṭumpootu araikkumpiṭu aatalaal
naan puucai ceytal muraiyoo

(Thayumanavar)

Here Saint Thayumanavar beautifully brings out the qualities of God. (God is common to all; He is present in all beings; He creates everything; He gives life to all and makes them act; He is detached and trancends *Manas, Vas* and *Kaya*; He is omnipotent; He is everlasting). All his songs are full of *Samarasa Gnana.* He attained *Mukthi* at Lakshmipuram (Ramnad District.) in 1742. His songs are regularly sung by all devotees of Siva in Tamil Nadu.

The famous *Rock Temple* also enjoys historical importance; the Pallava king of the 7th century who ruled from Kanchi has left some inscriptions in the temple. Uraiyoor near Tiruchy was the capital of the Cholas for some time. The temple served as a magazine for gun-powder and arms during the carnatic wars of the eighteenth century. The figure of a fish carved near Pillayar shows that the temple was under the Pandyas also. The Pallava inscriptions of the temple were carved after the Ruler was converted to Saivism. Some inscriptions of the later Cholas and Pandyas are also found. All of them have been published (770-790 of 1904).

Many are the *Bakthas* who attained the blessings of the Lord by worshipping here; some of them are Brahma, Sage Agastya, Uma, Jatayu, the Sapta Rishis, Tirisira, Rama, Arjuna, Hanuman, Vibishna, Sara-mamunivar, Maunaguru, Rathnavathi, Thayumanavadigal etc.

The temple is situated on a hill in the heart of the city. The cut-out steps leading to the temple are broad and roofed. There are many *Mantaps* including the thousand pillared *Mantap.* The thousand pillared mantap presents a busy sight with shops of flower-sellers, dealers in brass vessels etc. Some of the other mantaps are *Vahana Mantap,* (the Hundred pillared mantap), Chitra Mantap, the sixteen pillared mantap etc. The Pillayar temple is situated on the top of the Hill and presents a majestic view. The height of the hill is 273 feet and there are 417 steps leading to the temple; 172 steps lead to the Thayumanavar temple. The *Maunaguru Mantap* is also situated on the way.

The Lord is called Thayumanavar, Sevvanthinathar, Tirumalai Kozhundar, etc. The Goddess is called *Mattuvar Kuzhal Ammai,* (*Suganda Kundalambal* in *Sanskrit*). There is a *Puranic* legend that the Lord turned west to protect the flower-garden of *Sara-ma-Munivar*. The rays of the Sun fall on the Linga on 23rd, 24th and 25th of *Panguni* (first week of April) every year and on those days the Sun is said to worship the Lord.

Kaanthimathi a Chola Queen was a devout worshipper of Lord Thayumanavar; once as she was on her way to the Hill for worship, she fell down unconscious due to fatigue caused by advanced pregnancy. The Lord appeared before her and blessed her; the place where the fortunate queen thus received the blessings is said to be situated on the road leading to Uraiyoor. There is a temple there where Lord *Than Tondri Nathar* is enshrined. The *Sthalapurana* of this place says that Goddess Parvathi also did penance here and attained Lord Siva's grace and love.

Poojas are offered daily four times in the temple. The *Ther* festival conducted it *Chitrai* and the *Teppam* festival in *Panguni* are famous ones. The *Teppakulam* or the holy Tank near the hill is a big one surrounded on all sides by shops plying a busy trade; The *Vasanta Utsava* takes place in Vaikasi and another festival is conducted for the Goddess on the ***Pooram*** day in **Ani.**

The most sacred *Tirtha* of the place is the river Kaveri. The *Sivagangai* tirtha is situated near the Naganathaswamy temple northwest of Thayumanavar temple. The *Teppakulam* is called *Somarohini.* There are two more *Tirthas* called *Nanrudaivan* and *Theeyatu Illan,* of which the latter is a tank in the temple. Tirugnana Sambandar who visited the *Sthala* in the Seventh century has sung as follows of the two *Tirthas:*

naṉruṭaiyaaṉai tiiyatillaaṉai narai velleeru
oṉrutaiyaanai umaiyoru paakam uṭaiyaaṉai
ceṉrataiyaata tiruvadaiyaanai ciraappallik
kuṉruṭaiyaaṉaik kuura eṉ ullam kulirumee

(Campantar)

As the town is managed by a big municipality, there are plenty of hotels and lodgings for stay besides choultries. The town can be reached easily by bus or train from all important places of Tamil Nadu. Tiruchirappalli is also a flourishing business centre.

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21. SRIRANGAM

Srirangam or *Tiru-Arangam,* noted for the famous Vaishnavite temple, is near Tiruchy. West of the *Sthala* the river *Kaveri* divides into two branches known as *Kaveri* and *Kollidam* and the place is flanked on either side by the rivers and Lord Ranganatha is seen reclining on 'the islet' as it is called. The town is on the Tiruchy-Madras chord Line prior to Tiruchy station. The temple is about a mile from Srirangam station; the town is surrounded by groves found on the banks of the two rivers which are never completely dry.

The shrine is surrounded by seven *Praharas*; in fact the major part of the town is found in the *Praharas.* There are plenty of choultries and hotels here; buses are plying constantly from Tiruchy.

The *Ranga Vimana* of the temple is one of the best of its kind. The *Sthala Mahatmya* shows how it came to the banks of the Kaveri, from *Vaikunta.* It also continues to account for the *Macha Vatar* and *Koorma-Avatar* of Lord Vishnu. The fish are said to protect their young ones by keeping them always within sight; thus eyes are the main source of protection for the young ones; the turtles are said to protect their young ones by keeping them always in mind; thus thought is the main source of protection in this case; birds, on the other hand, nurse their young ones by means of *Sparsa,* while man brings up the young ones by feeding them with meat or milk. The first two *Avatars* of God—the *Fish-Avatar* and the *Tortoise* (*Turtle*) *Avatar*—are said to symbolise the fact that He protects the *Jeevas* or lives of the Universe by means of Sight and Thought. Thus the account of the two avatars beautifully brings out the truth that all the Universe is inevitably under His eye and in His Care.

Srirangam is the most important of the hundred and eight *Divya Desas* consecrated by the Alwars in their sacred hymns. The temple is also called the Big Temple (*Peria Kovil*); the very word *Kovil* refers to Srirangam so far as the Vaishnavas are concerned just as the Saivas refer to Chidambaram. In his third *Tiru Anthathi* Peyalwar sings of the Kovil. This *Sthala* enjoys the unique glory of having been praised by all the twelve *Alwars*—the Vaishnava Saints. It is also noted for its antiquity. The idol of Sri Ranganatha installed here was given to Vibishana by Sri Rama and Sage Valmiki also has referred to the *Sthala.* The *Silappadikaram,* one of the five ancient epics of Tamil Nadu, has a fine passage on the Lord: "Lord Vishnu with Lakshmi on His bosom lies on the bed of the Thousand-hooded Serpent on the banks of the Kaveri at Tiruarangam, just as the blue clouds rest on the golden peaks of mountains". Perialwar sings how the *Sthala* is worshipped

by all in the South and north of India. Pillai Perumal Ayyangar says in his *Nootru-Ettu-Anthathi* that the glories of the *Sthala* are boundless and beyond expression.

It is said that there was once a contest among Ganga (the Ganges) Devi, Yamuna, Saraswahti and Kaveri. They quarrelled for supremacy. God acclaimed Ganga as the greatest of all. The irate Kaveri did penance to become greater than Ganga. God was pleased with her devotion and told her that He would choose to lie on the banks of Kaveri some time later and then She would be considered greater than Ganga. Then it was that the river branched off into two and the land between the Kaveri and the—Kollidam came to be called *Arangam* (sacred island); the Lord of the place is *Aranganatha* and the *Vimana* also called *Aranga Vimana* was first given to Brahma who in turn gave it to King Ikshvaku of Ayodhya. Sri Rama who was a descendant of Ikshvaku gave the *Vimana* to *Vibishana*; the latter, on his way to Ceylon placed it on the land between Kaveri and Kollidam on a sacred spot called Chandra Pushkarani; (*Anantha Peeda*). When he tried to take it again, he found it immovable. There is also a tradition that this was caused by the *Leela* of *Uchi Pillayar* (His temple is on the top of a hill at Tiruchy).

When the Muslims attacked South India in the fourteenth Century, the *Archakas* or the priests of the tempie first removed the idol to Tirunarayanapuram at Mysore and from there to *Tiruppathi*. When the Muslim power declined, one Gopana Udayar, Minister of Kampanna Raya II of Vijayanagar removed the idol to to Chenchi (Jinji) and kept it at Singavaram Temple for some time. Later he took it to Srirangam and installed it there for worship. A book called *Guru Paramparai Prabava* contains this interesting itinerary of Sri Ranganatha. There is also a Sanskrit inscription referring to the same in the temple. The tirtha is the *Chanra Pushkarani* and the Sthala Vrutcha is the *punnai* tree. The eastern towers called *Vellaikopuran* is the highest of all towers here (165 feet). The *Nava Tirthas* of the place are *Chandra Pushkarani, Bilva Tirtha, Jambu Tirtha Aswatha Tirtha, Palasa Tirtha, Punnaha Tirtha, Varuna Tirtha, Kadamba Tirtha* and *Amra Tirtha.*

The most important festival of the temple drawing thousands of devotees from all parts is the *Vaikunda Ekadasi* festival conducted in *Margali.* It is said that the festival commemorates the victory of *Ekadasi Devata* over some *Asuras.*

Both *Nitya* and *Naimittika* rites of worship are equally important in the temple. All offerings of food are prepared with pure ghee. Only ghee is used for lighting the lamp at the *Moolasthana*. At the different periods of the day from early morning to midnight, different kinds of food preparations (Palahara, sweets, Chitra anna etc.) are offered to the Lord. Similarly the Lord is vested with different kinds of dresses daily. Thus the Lord gives *Darsan* daily in varied forms and a devotee should stay in the temple for a whole day for forming a full picture of the Lord in all His perfect glories.

Many are the festivals conducted every month, of which the *Ira Pattu* and *Pahal Pattu* conducted in *Margali* are important. On the Vaikunta Ekadasi day, lakhs of people throng to worship the Lord. Separate festivals like *Brahmotsava* are conducted for the Lord and the Goddess in *Chitrai*. Moreover on important days and on the *Janma Nakshatra* day also festivals are conducted. During the *Poojas* offered in Margali, the *Pasuras* or srcred hymns of the Alwars are recited. More than 4000 songs are recited on the whole during twenty - one days regularly. Besides, there are separate festivals conducted for Senai Mudaliar and other deities of the temple. On the sixth day of Brahmotsava in *Chitrai*,, the festival of Andal is conducted on a grand scale and it is inspiring to see the Lord exchanging bridal garlands with Andal. The Twelve Alwars and Manavala-Mamuni are also honoured with festivals.

Numberless are the *Bakthas* who have sung on the Lord of the Sthala.

There are many inscriptions in the temple. They range from the ninth to the Sixteenth centuries, belonging to the periods of Cholas, Pandayas, Cheras, Hoysalas, and the Rayas of Vijayanagar. They deal with grants of lands and gold to the temple for facilitating *Poojas* etc. and also speak of the victories of the various rulers.

All the Alwars and Andal (*Tiruppavai and Nachiyar Tirumoli*) have sung of the Lord. *Devya Kavi* Pillai Perumal Ayyangar has written four sacred books known as *Tiru-Aranga-Kalambakam*, *Tiru-Arangattu Malai*, *iru-Arangattu Anthathi* and *Sriranga Nayakar Oosal*. Kambar, the great epic poet of Tamil Nadu, first read out his *Ramayana* in this temple.

22. URAIYUR

There is a saying in Tamil which amply demonstrates the importance of *Uraiyur*: "*Oor ena Paduvathu Uraiyoor*". This *Sthala* is just a mile from the Trichy Fort Station and it now forms part of Trichy Town. Sri Kamalavalli Nachiyar, a manifestiation of Goddess Lakshmi (*Tiru*) was born as the daughter of Nanda Chola in this place; hence the name *Tiru Uraiyur*. Some of the other less known names are *Uraka Puram*, *Nisula Puri* and *Uranthai*. When a Chola King was taken in procession on an-elephant around the city, he found a cock offering resistance to the elephant; hence the names *Kozhi* or *Kozhiyur* also to the place. This incident is mentioned in the *Silappadikaram* and many other works of the Sangam period also contain references to the place. Thus it appears that the city is one of the oldest in Tamil Nadu.

Nandachola a *Baktha* was childless and moved by his prayers, Goddess Lakshmi hereself was born as a daughter to him. She was called *Kamala Valli*. Once she was culling flowers in the garden with her companions. Lord Ranganatha came riding to the place, and gave her *Darsan* and disappeared. Kamalavalli was full of love for Him and she praised him.

When Nandachola came to know of his daughter's love from his wife, he asked her about her lover" who won her heart ". She expressed her idea and implored her father to marry her to Sri Ranganatha. He too fulfilled her wish; the marriage was celebrated at *Uraiyoor* and the daughter was sent to the Bridegrooms' place, Srirangam, with plenteous dowry. Kamalavalli entered the temple at Srirangam, vanished and thus attained the lotus feet of the Lord. Nandachola who had no other children of his own gave away all his properties to the Ranganatha temple and built the mantap, the tower and praharas.

At Uraiyur Lord Alagiya Manavala and Kamalavalli are facing north towards Srirangam. The main tower also faces east. Lord Ranganatha also called *Azhagia Manavalar* is seen in the standing posture. The Goddess, Kamalavalli is seen to His right seated. As the divine marriage was conducted here, both the God and the Goddess are seen as Bride and Bridegroom. The Goddess is also called *Varalakshmi* and *Uraiyur Valli*.

There are certain other *Sannadhis* also like those of *Senai Mudaliar*, Anchaneya, Garudalwar, Nammalwar, Udayavar, Tiruppana Alwar etc. There are also many *Mantaps* like *Vasanta Mantap*, *Unchal Mantap*, *Teepa Tirunal Mantap*, *Vellikizhamai Mantap*, *Ardha Mantap etc.* The *Vimana* is *Kalyana Vimana*. The tirthas of the place are the river, Kudamurutti and Kalyana tirtha. The Lord was worshipped here by the Sun God, Dharma Raja and all the Devas.

Tirukozhi or Uraiyur is one of the 108 *Divya Desas* immortalised by the Alwars in their songs. Tirumangai Alwar has sung on the Lord and Tiruppana Alwar was born here. The glories of Uraiyur are given in such works as "*Nisulapuri Mahatmyam*", *Divya Soori Charitam, Kovilovhuku, Lakshmi Kavyam, Sri Ranga Raja Charita Paanam* etc.

Besides being a *Vaishnava Sthala,* Uraiyur is also a noted *Siva Sthala*: The *Thevaram* refers to the place as *Mookkicharam.* Ptolemy has also made a mention of this place in his writings. The place is also noted for its antiquity and historical importance. It served as the capital for the Cholas for a long time. Some of the other names of the place *Kukudapuri, Varanam Nisulapuri, Vilvavanam. Maloora Vanam Etc.*

The *Siva Temple* is situated in the middle of the city. There are two *Praharas.* The Swami Sannadhi faces east and that of the Goddess faces, south. In the inner *Prahara* are found *Vinayaka, Muruka, Lakshmi,* the *Navagrahas, Nalvar,* Sage *Udanga And* so on. Outside the temple wall we see the Nandi *Mantap* and Siva tirtha. The *Sthala Vritcha* is Vilva tree. There is no tower at the entrance. The Sthalapuranam says that the temple was built by *Suravaditta Chola* bidden by God; it also refers to the episodes of the Pig and the Hunter who attained *Mukthi* here.

The names given to the Lord are *Pancha Varna Iswarar, Ay Vanna Peruman, Ay Nira Nayanar and Nagesar*: the inscriptions found in the temple refer to Him as *Vendan Mookkicharam Udayar, Tiru Udai Thalai Perumal, Tiru Uraiyur Tirunthai Thalai Mahadevar* etc. The term *Panchavarneswarar* (The Lord of the Five colours) is devived from the following episode. The Lord appeared before Brahma and sage Udhanga who worshipped him, in five colours during the five divisions of the day when offerings were made to him; (the five colours are associated with five precious stores, viz., *Aradhana, Spatika, Gold, Diamond* and *Chitra*). Some of the other names are *Vilvaranyanathar, Kanthimathi Manavalar* and *Urandhainathar.* The Goddess is also called *Kanthimathi.* Big festivals are conducted during the months ot *Vaikasi* and *Adi.*

This is also the birth place of Puhazh Chola and Ko Chen Kat Chola, the two *Nayanars.* It was here that Karikala Chola, Nalankilli and Killivalavan crowned themselves. Moreover, many ancient poets of Tamil Nadu lived here. To name some of them-Ilampon Vanikanar, Maruttuvan Damodaranar, Mudukannan Sattnar, Mudukoothannar. One of the best grammarians, Muthu Veera Upadyapar also lived here and his book *Muttu Veeriyam* is one of the rare grammar books in Tamil.

Tirugnana Sambandar has dedicated a song to the *Sthala* and Mahavidwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai has also written the *Uraiyru Puranam, uttullayiram, Sivanam Pal Todai Venba* in honour of the Lord.

On the pillar near the entrance to the inner temple and also on the eastern wall of the *Amman Sannadhi*, we find the figures of the cock offering battle to the elephant. The inscriptions on the southern, western and northern walls of the Swami Sannadhi have been published by the Government (1907); they are not to be traced today because of repeated works of renovation. All of them speak of the grants of lands and villages for facilitating *Poojas* and for conducting festivals. They belong to the times of Raja Kesari Varma, Parakesari Varma, Udayar Rajendra Deva, and Konerinmai Kondan. *Uraiyur* is referred to as a place in the Uraiyur Kootram situated in *Keralantaka Valanadu* or *Rajagambira Valanadu.* It is interesting to note the name of a village in the inscription *Athi Guna Karpaka Nalloor.* On the Chola Rock near Uraiyoor is found an inscription of *Tribuvana Veera Vikrama Chola.* But the inscription is not distinct.

As the place is part of Trichy, pilgrims and tourists can stay at Trichy and reach the place by bus.

MADURAI DISTRICT

23. MADURAI

Madurai, one of the most ancient cities of Tamil Nadu, flourished as a great capital city of thr Pandayas; it is at the same time the most ancient home of Tamil culture. From the later Sangam period to this day it has continued to grow in importanee, as a religious, educational, cultural and industrial centre; it is today having a population next only to Madras-more than 5 lakhs; thus it is the second biggest city of Madras State. Here Lord Siva came as Somasundarar to wed the Pandyan Princess *Minakshi*, a manifestation of Goddess Parvathi. Lord Muruga also was born here as Ugra Pandya. Kumara Guruparar aptly sums up the glories of Madurai in his *Madurai Kalambakam* thus :

tamara niirppuvaṉam mulutorunkiiṉraal
taaṭaatakaa teevi eṉrorupeer
tarikka vantatuvum taṉimutal orunii
cavuntira maaṟa ṉaaṉatuvium
kumaraveel valuti ukkiran eṉapper
konṇṭatum taṉṭamil maturam
kuuṭṭuṇna velunta veeṭkaiyal eṉil ik
kolitamilp perumaiyaar arivaar

(Maturaik kalampakam)

He says that love of Tamil was the primary cause which made the Divine Being choose Madurai to be born here.

Madurai is also celebrated in Song and story as the scene of the Sport of Lord Siva. The *Halasya Mahatmiya* in Sanskrit and the *Tiruvilayadal Puranam* in Tamil give an account of *Siva Leela* on the banks of the river, *Vaigai.* Most of the ancient works refer to Madurai as *Naan Mada KoOdal, Aalavay etc.*, these names are derived from the various *Sports,* in which Siva indulged to protect his *Bakthas.*

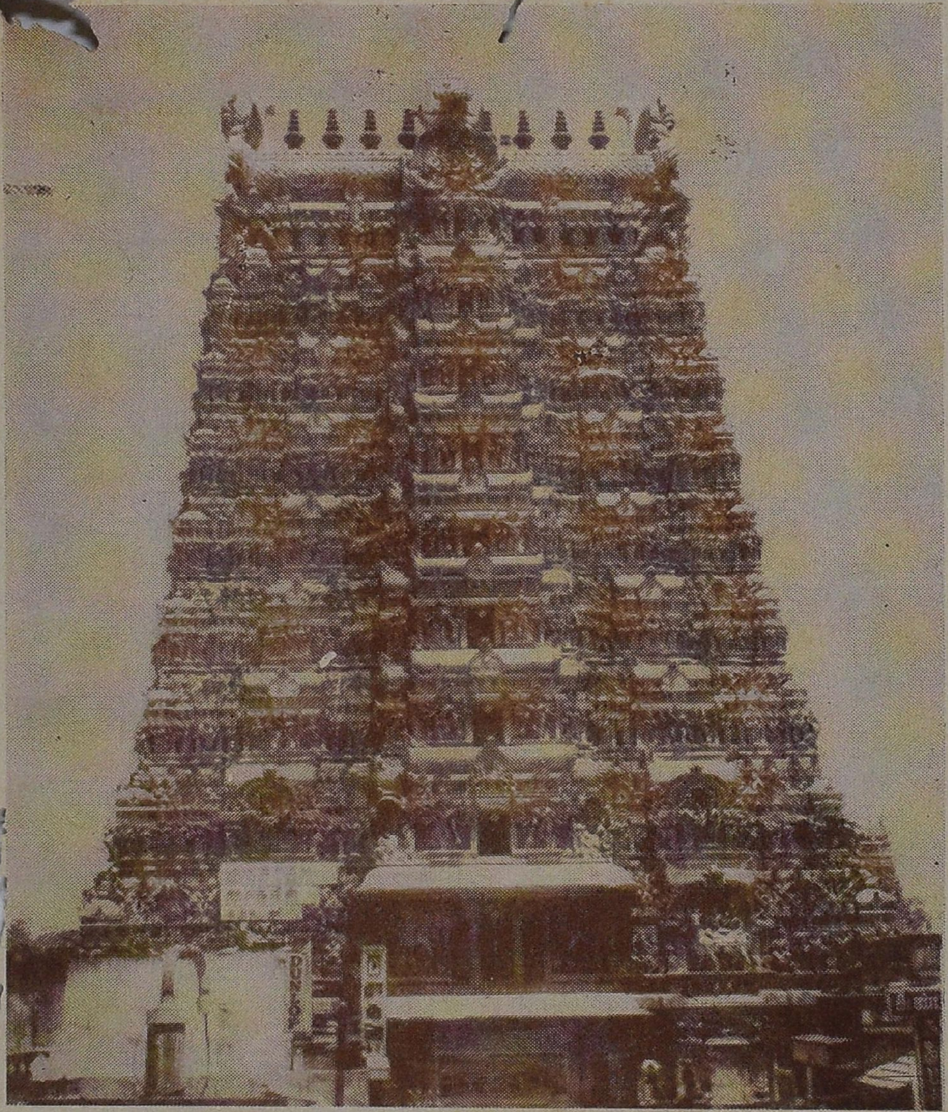
During the seventh century Janism flourshed here ; in fact all but the prime Minister *Kula Chirayar* and Queen *Mankayarku Arasi* were Jains; most of the Jain Saints were living in the caves around Madurai. Gnana Sambandar came to Madurai at the repuest of the Queen and defeated the Jains in a debate on Religion; he also cured the King of his ailments, and made the Holy *Palmyra Leaves* Hymns (*Edu*) float against the current of the floods in the river; Thus he did many miracles and converted the King to Saivism ; he was largely responsible for the restoration of Saivism in Madurai and a detailed account of his missionary zeal is found in the *Tiruvilayadal Puranam* and Sekkilar's *Peria Puranam.*

The Lord of the *Sthala* is *Chokkanathar* and the Goddess is *Minakshi Minakshi* is considered as the Presiding Deity of Madurai. The sixty four *Leelas* of Lord Siva are commemorated in festivals every year.

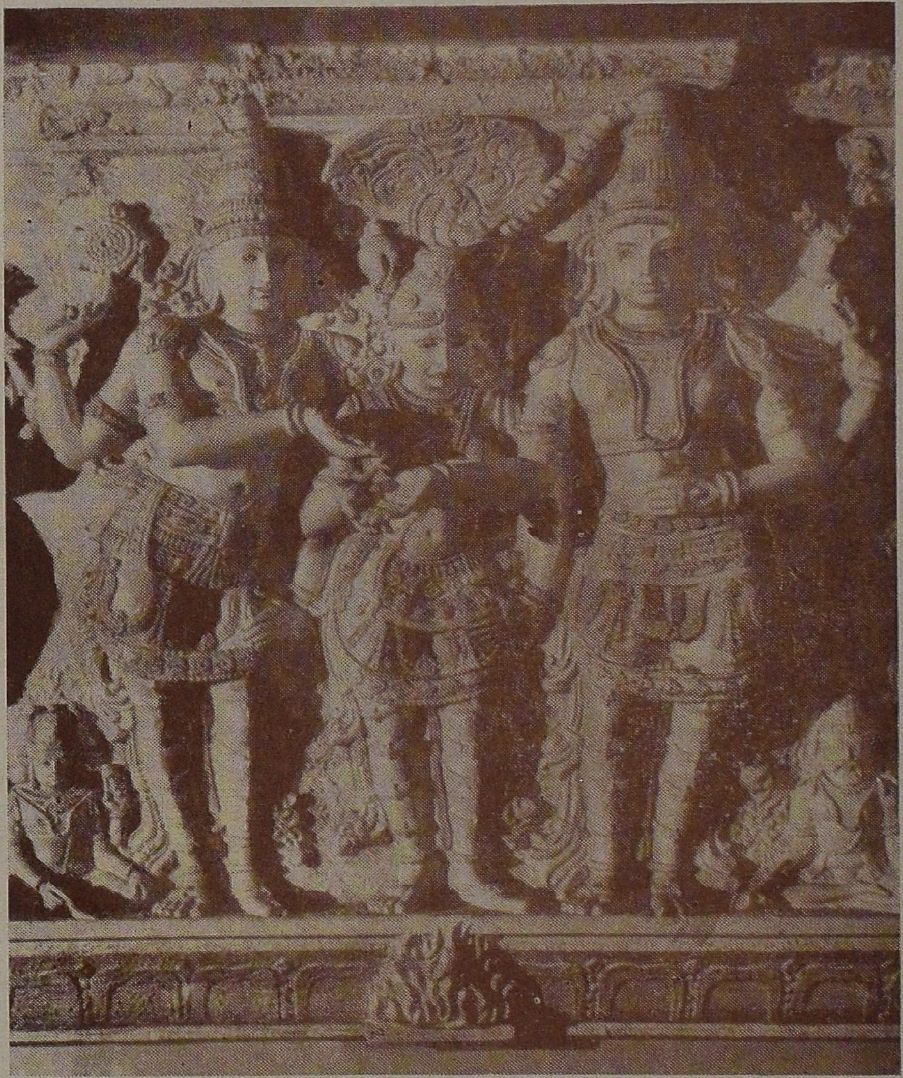
The city is situated on the Southern banks of the *Vaigai* and the towers of the temple present a majestic sight even as one near the city. Now the people of the city have taken the renovation work on a large scale .

Many are the ancient literary works that refer to Madurai. There is a book called *Maduraik Kanchi* dealing entirely with the city as it was 2000 years ago. It says that the streets were broad in the city, and gives a detailed account of the various articles and commodities displayed for sale in shops and of the merchants who thronged here from various parts of the country and from abroad. Madurai continues to be a flourishing business centre where the nights appear as busy as daytime with many shops kept open and plying a busy trade till 2 a.m.

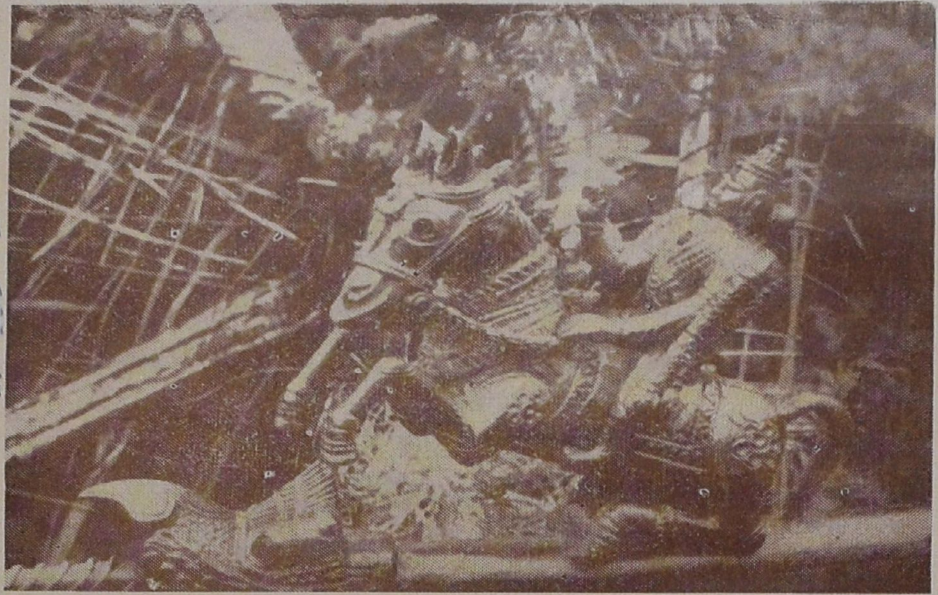
Saint Manickavasagar lived in this city, worshipped Siva and propagated Saivism. His story is well-known. He was aminister of the Pandya-ruler and he went to Tiruperunthurai to buy horses for the King; On his way, he received the blessings of Lord Siva by having *Darsan* and he used the King's money for building a temple. In the meanwhile Siva converted the foxes (in the woods) into horses and fetched them to the King, which turned into foxes at night and howled; The King suspected Manickavasagar of trickery and punisbed him; there were floods in Vaigai; the Lord himself appeared as a collie and He raised the banks to stop them and thus saved



Tower of Sri Meenakshi Temple - Madurai



Meenakshi Kalyanam - Madurai



Azagar Festival (after Meenakshi Tirumanam) at Vaikai on Horse Back

Palani Malai (Hill)

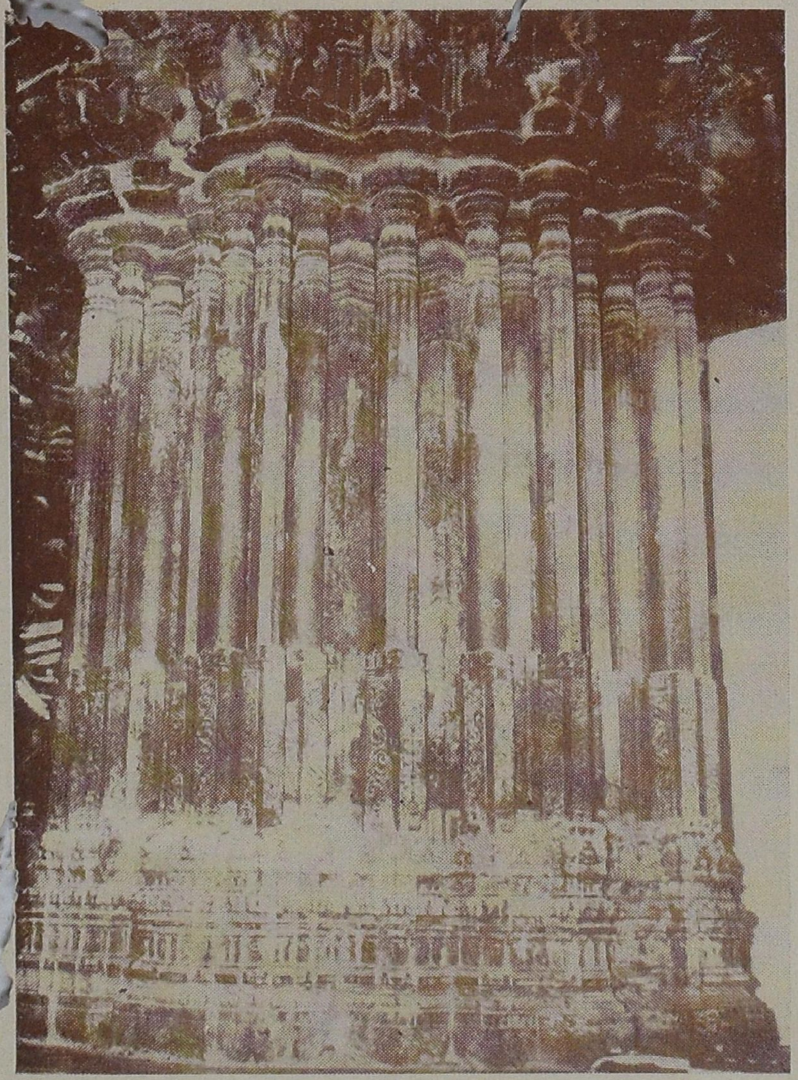
Palani Andavar

Sepparai Natarajar (Tirunelveli)

Goddess Gandimathi (Tirunelveli)

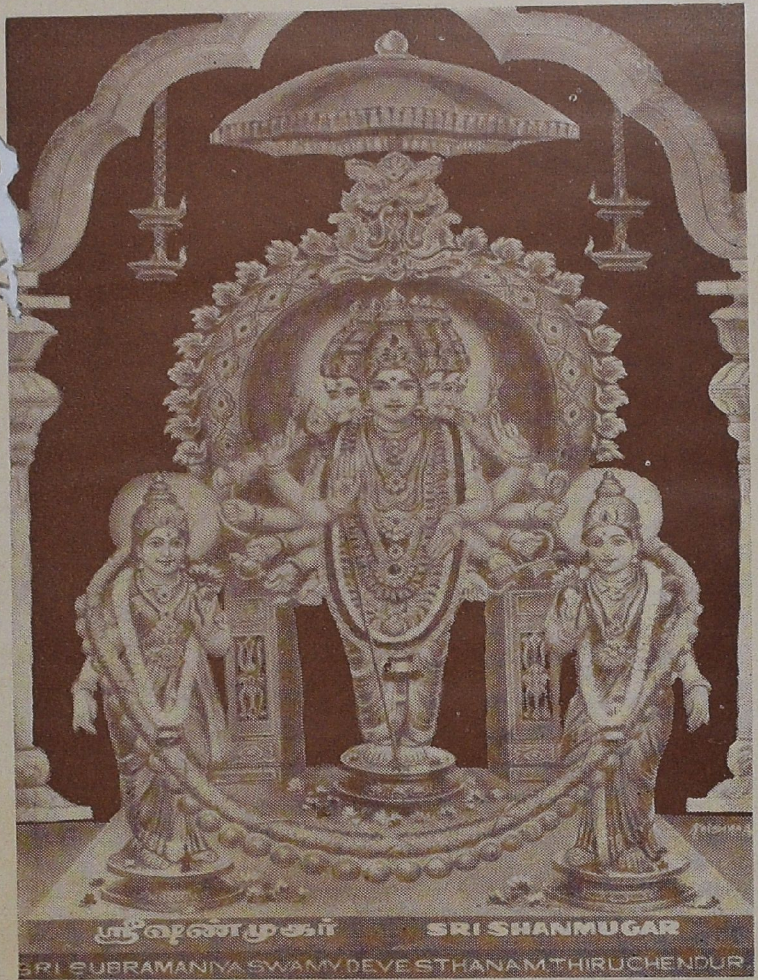
Entrance of Nellaiyappar Temple (Tirunelvelli) with Dwarapalakas

The Corridar at Tirunelvelli (in every Temple this kind of corridars are used for Finearts, Discourses & Other Community Meetings apart from the use as Prayer Hall)



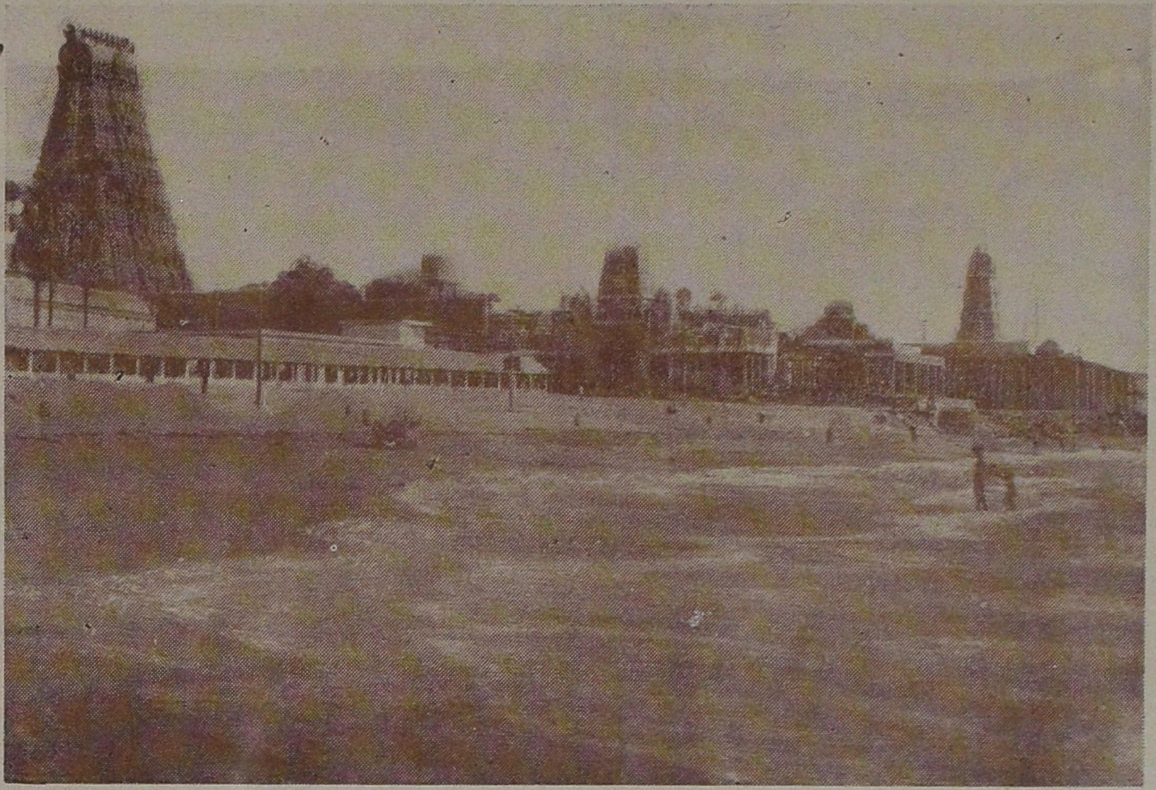
Musical Pillars at Nellai Temple

Tala Chakram (Different kinds of Tala of Carnatic Music)



Arumugaswamy (Tiruchendur)

Kumari theivam (Cape Comorin)



Tiruchendur Shore Temple

Vivekanandar Rock Temple - Kaniakumari

Arthanereswarar
(H[illegible]ale & Half Female) (Tiruchenkodu) (The image of Umapati)

Mountain way (Tiruchenkodu)

the city. Later the King understood the greatness of Saint Manickavasagar and worshipped him. The details regarding Manickavasagar's life are found in *Tiruvadavoor Puranam* and the *Tiruvilayadal Puranam.*

The note given by the Madurai District Gazetter regarding the temple can well be quoted here, as it gives a good account of it.

> **Madurai**: "Madura the Capital of the Taluk and District is the largest moffusil town in the Presidency, being the chief place in the District, Madurai, the Head-Quarters of all the usual Officers. It stands on the main line of the South Indian Railway, 345 miles from Madras. It possesses a Traveller's Bungalow, rooms for the Europeans at the Railway station and many Chatrams for natives. The chief of the last is that opposite the Station which was founded and endowed from funds left by Queen Mangammal and is still called by her name. Municipality was constituted in 1866. Now it has become a corporation. The town is the industrial, educational and religious centre of the District".

"Madura stands on the right bank of the Vaigai. In the neighbourhood rise three small prominent hills, which are called the Anaimalai, Pasumalai and Nagamalai from their supposed resemblance to an Elephant, a Cow, and a Snake respectively. The South Gopuram of the great Meenakshi temple is 484 feet above the sea, but this tower is itself some 150 feet above the ground and the town is thus only about 330 feet above the sea level. The Vaigai bridge was completed in 1889. The view up the river from this is one of the most charming in the District. In the foreground stands the little stone Mayya Mantapam to which the image of Siva is taken at the great Chitrai feast".

"Rous Peter is the best remembered of all the Collectors of Madura. He gave valuable jewels to Meenakshi Temple and Alagar Koil. The people nick-named him "Peter Pandiya". He deid in 1828. It remains to refer to the three buildings for which Madura is so widely known, namely the great temple, the tank called the Teppakulam and the Palace of Tirumalai Nayakkan".

"**The Great Temple**: The Temple stands in the centre of the town. Except the inner shrines, probably none of it is older than the 16th century. The original building of the of days Pandiya Kings was almost entirely destroyed by the Muslim troops of Malick Kafer in 1310. The inner shrines are mentioned by Manicka Vasagar, who is thought to have lived in the 5th century of the present era. Four high-stone-walls, in the middle of each of which is a gate-way surmounted by pyramidical gopurams enclose a nearly rectangular space, about 830 feet by 730 feet, within which is a

laybrinth of store houses, cloisters, mandapams and lesser srines and the sacred tank, and in the centre surrounded by other walls with more gate-ways and towers, the inner shrines of the God and Goddess. The God is *Siva*, in his form Sokkanatha or Sundaram—"the beautiful"—and the Goddess, his wife, is Meenakshi—the "fish-eyed". Round about the Temple outside the higher walls is a neat garden, fenced with iron railings which was laid out to replace the heaps of rubbish, which then occupied this space. The Gopurams are of the ordinary pattern. They are unusually lofty and are a land-mark for miles around. The highest of them is the South Gopuram, the top of which is about 150 feet above the street below it".

"The legend regarding the deities in the local sthalapurana says that Meenakshi was the daughter of the Pandiya King who to the consternation of her parents was born with three breasts. A fairy, however, told the King that the third breast would disappear as soon as she met her future husband and it did so when she first encountered Siva. They were wedded accordingly with much pomp".

"Siva's shrine contains several subsidiary buildings which is not necessary to particularise, a stump, which is said to be all that now remains of the legendary forest of Kadamba trees, which is supposed to have formerly covered all this part of the Country. In it are kept the Temple jewels, which include a Pendant for the God, given by a Pandiyan King, a Head-dress studded with pearls and rubies presented by Thirumalai Naicken, and a pair of golden stirrups, which were the gift of Rous Peter goes the story for an escape from an elephant he had wounded. In one corner is the Mantapa Nayakka Mantapam or King Mantapam among Mantapams. It is quite eclipsed by the Kambathadi Mantapam (Flag Staff Mantapam). Behind the Flag Staff are four huge images of Siva dancing, of the fearsome Goddess Kali and of Veerabhadra, in two different shapes, which are cut out of a single block of stone".

"The chief festivals are the Chitrai, Teppakulam, and Avani Moolam festivals. The first occurs in Chitrai (April-May). The second takes place in Thai (January-February). This was originated by Thirumalai Naicker after he had built the Teppakulam and is fixed for the Anniversary of his birthday. The third occurs in August-September".

The *Sthala* is also called *Kadamba Vana* as it was once filled with *Kadamba* trees. The sthalavrutcha is *Kadamba* tree found in the temple. As the tree is blighted, its trunk is protected by a *Kavacha*. According to a tradition, Indra himself is said to have built the temple to be relieved of his sins.

The town is planned with wide roads, all running in square parellel lines with the famous Minakshi temple in the centre; the roads in the square are each named after the months of the year in the Hindu calendar. (East, West, North, South, Chitrai, Avanimoola, Masi streets etc.,). The outer most prahara of the temple is itself called *Adi Street*; the next square is *Chitrai*, thereafter we have the *Avanimoola* streets, *Masi* streets and *Veli* streets running around. Thus the life of the community revolves round the temple of Sri Minakshi.

The temple is beautified with eight towers and two *Vimans*. The central shrines are those of Minakshi and Lord Sundareswara, on the left and right sides of the temple respectively.

The visitor enters by the *Ashta Sakthi Mantap* in front of the Minakshi. Sannadhi. We find flanking monoliths of *Ashtasakthis* in the mantap, carved with great spirit. Thus we reach the sannadhi of Meenakshi and all offer worship here first before they go to the Swami Sannadhi. There is a tradition regarding worship being offered first to Goddess Minakshi and then to Siva. An inscription found in the temple also refers to the same. Nobody enters the temple by the Main tower of the Swami Sannadhi and the inscription says that during the time of Vijaya Ranga Chockanatha Nayak, the Officers demanded exhorbitant taxes from the temple authorities and that the latter unable to meet the demands thought of committing suicide and that one of them actually killed himself at the entrance of the tower leading to the Swami Sandadhi; ever since nobody enters by the same to the temple. The time of the above mentioned ruler is said to be the middle of the sixteenth century.

After crossing the Ashtasakthi mantap, the visitor passes through the Minakshi Nayak Mantap and the Mudali Mantap in succession to reach the Minakshi Sannadhi. From there can be seen the *Potramarai Tank*, considered to be a holy *Tirtha* of the *Sthala*. It is said that the ancient poets of the Sangam period used to sit on a gold-plated floating plank in the tank as they carried on their literary activities. It was believed that the plank would not bear the undeserved. It is said that when Tiruvalluvar placed his immortal *Kural* on the float along with other works by various other writers, it immediately shrank in size-giving room only to the divine *Kural*. Thus the *Kural* came to be acnowledged as the best of Tamil works. There is a **golden lotus** installed in the midst of the tank; there is also a tradition which accounts for the absence of fish in the waters.

Next we reach the *Yali* mantap also called *Kilikattu* mantap where we find parrots in cages-hung from the ceiling. Goddess Minakshi is also seen holding a parrot. After crossing the mantap we actually reach the entrance of Minakshi Sannadhi. On the northern end we find the entrance to the

Swami Sannadhi. A huge image of Ganesa called-*Mukkuruni* Pillayar greets us on the way to the Swami Sannadhi. In the Minakshi Sanndhi and *Praharas* of the same, we find many exquisite pieces of sculpture noted for intricate workmanship. There are many paintings on the walls also. The image of the Presiding Deity, Goddes Minakshi is indeed inspiring and the Goddess has inspired some of the most beautiful and moving poetlcal compositions in Tamil.

The Swami Sannadhi is one of the biggest filled as it is with many *Mantaps*, including the thousand pillared mantap, *Kalyana* mantap, kambattadi mantap etc. each one of the *Mantaps* is a veritable treasure house of art. Special mention must be made of the thousand pillared mantap praised by Fergusson as "the wonder of of the place", containing "sculptures those of any other hall I have seen". The sculptures depict scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabarata and other *Puranas*. The Tirukalyanam of Minakshi-Sundaresa is conducted in the mantap in the full Moon day in Chitrai.

The *Kambattadi* mantap displays the greatest triumph of "sculptural skill". Even pillar here is full of elaborate carvings of various *Puranic* figures. This was built by Krishna Veerappa Nayak in 1494 and was rencently renovated. Near the entrance of the tower inside the shrine, in front of the *Kambattadi* mantap we find the mammoth figures of *Agni Veerabadra, Akora Veerabadra,-Urdhuva Tandava and Badra Kali* carved on four gigantic pillars.

After passing the *Kambattadi* mantap we reach the *Swamy Sannadhi*. Many idols of various deities besides the Vanni tree, the well and Linga associated with the *Tiruvilayadal Puranam*, are found here. There are five figures of Lord Nataraja also here. The shrine of Nataraja is called *Velliambalam* where we find the unique figure of Nataraja with the right foot raised above instead of the left usually seen. It is said that the Lord changed the pose to pacify a Pandya King who wept to think of the sufferings of the Lord dancing-eternally on one foot (the left foot). The *Tiruvilayadal Puranam* has a chapter entitled *Kaalmari Adina Padalam* referring to this episode. This is one of the five places sacred to Lord Nataraja-(the Velliambalam); the others are the *Ratna Saba* at Tiruvalankadu, the *Porsaba* at Chidambaram, the *Tambra Saba* at Tirunelveli and the *Chitra Saba* at Kutralam (Courtallam).

The Sundareswarar Sannadi is near the *Velliambalam*. It was here that Lord Siva married Minakshi. The *Purana* says that Goddess Parvathi was born as Minakshi (the fish-eyed Goddess) to a Pandya ruler, conqured

all the lands, went to Kailas and married Lord Siva. The fortunate father of the divine daughter was called Malaya Dwaja Pandya. The *Chitra Festival* is the most important festival here.

Outside the temple there are some other mantaps like *Pudu Mantap* (the New mantap), *Nahara Mantap, Thodi Mantap, Mayya Mantap* etc. The *Pudu Mantap* is a rentangular porch 333 feet by 105 feet, with a roof of granite supported by four parellelled rows of 124 sculptural stone pillars each 20 feet high and no one pillar duplicating the design of another. This was built by Tirumalai Nayak. There are many small temples around the *Mantap* such as those of Tiruvappudayar, Vadatiru alavaay, Then Tirualavaay, Hanumar, Bairavar and so on. The Vada tirualavaay temple is said to be the old Chockanathar temple. It is said that Chockanathar was first installed here.

There is also a Vaishnava temple in Madurai which is equally important, in South Veli Street. The Lord of this *Sthala is called Koodal Azhagar.* Lord Vishnu who came to attend Parvathi's marriage is said to have stayed here. This is one of the Hundred and eight sacred Vaishnava *Sthalas.* Tirumangai Alwar also has dedicated a song to the Lord. The inner tower and its vimana are beautifully carved with delicate designs. The *Vimana* is *Ashtanga Vimana.* We find Soorya Naryana and Lord Vishnu in the reclining posture in the temple. There are some other temples also in Madurai such as Madana Gopala swami temple, Nakkirar temple, Krishna temple etc.,

At the south-east end of city is situated the *Teppakulam,* an almost perfect square 1000 feet north-south and 950 feet east-west. This is called *Mariamman Teppakulam* or *Vandiyoor Teppakulam.* There is a beautiful *Mantap* surrounded by pleasant groves in the midst of the tank. The Annual teppam festival for Minakshi-Sundareswara takes place here on *Puram* day in *Thai.* This tank was excavated by Tirumālai Nayak in 1645 and the Teppam festival is said to be conducted on his birthday. No visitor to Madurai misses to see the Teppakulam.

Another place of interest to the tourist is the *Mahal* or the palace of Tirumalai Nayak. It is said to have first covered a wider area than that at present. The open court-yard of the palace built of brick and mortar (No wood is used anywhere) is seen with a roofed arcade running round it; and the arcade is beautiful, supported tall stone pillars situated at equal distance from one another (40 feet high) and connected by foliated brick arches of exquisite workmanship. The central *Mantap* (Asthana mantap) is often compared with the Diwan-i-aamat Delhi. The dome is 16 feet wide 16 feet high. There are many Government Offices and Courts housed here at present.

The great temple-city Madurai has also many inscriptions of historical importrnce, all of which have been published. (5 in 1890, 5 in 1905, 1 in 1915, 1 in 1918, 24 in 1941 and 9 in 1943) Most of them belong to the Pandyas and a few to Tirumalai Nayak. Some of them are found in Chaste Tamil. They also speak of the structure and growth of the temple and of the various charitable endowments made to it. There are also to be found some fine poetical pieces.

Numberless are the saints and devotees who have sung on the Lord and Minakshi. It is said that Kumara Gurupara sang his *Pillai Tamil* here; When he sang "fourth song" found in *Varugai Paruva*, Goddess Minakshi herself is said to have appeared as a little maid and garlanded the *Baktha*. There are many songs in the Thevaram also in honour of the Deity and Manivasagar has also dedicated his songs to the Deity. All of them are steeped in religious fervour and they give peace of mind to those who recite them. One of the famous songs of Tirugnana Sambandar written on the leaves left floating against the current on the floods is as follows:

vaalka antaṇar vaaṉavar aaṉiṉam
viilka taṉpuṉal veentaṉum oonkuka
aalka tiiyatellaam araṉ naamamee
cuulka vaiyakamum tuyar tiirkavee

(Campantar)

The place where the *Palmirah Leaves* reached the shore is now called *Tiru-Edu-Aham.* Tirupparankunram, the famous Muruga Sthala and Alagar Kovil, the equally famous Vishnu *Sthala* are situated south-west and north east of the city at a distance of 5 and 13 miles respectively.

This city being next in importance to Madras, there are many good hotels here with boarding and lodging facilities. The *Mangamma* choultry opposite the Railway Station also cater to the needs of pilgrims. The "Meenakshi Nilayam" is a convenient rest house built by the Municipality near the Central Bus Stand. On the northern bank of the river are situated the Circuit House, and other guest-houses. The local T. V. S. Bus service knits all parts of Madurai. (Now Govt. Pandian Transport) there are enough facilities to reach any part of the State from here either by bus or Train.

24. PAZHANI (PALANI):

Palani enjoys unique importance among the *Sthalas* dedicated to Lord Muruka, the favourite Deity of the Tamils since ancient times. Some other names of the place are *Siva Giri*, *Pazhanapuri* and *Pothini*. The *Ahananuru* of the Sangam period (First century A.D.) calls it Pothini; this term was later transformed into **'Pazhani'**; some say that the name suggests "a place surrounded by fields", (*Pazhanam*=fied). One of the Pandya inscription in the temple on the top of the hill calls it *Vaikavoor Nattu Pazhani Mali*. The *Sthalapurana* gives yet another account of the derivation of the place-name. Once Naradha offered a pomegranate (Mathulam Kani) to Lord Siva at Kailash. There is a Version that Naradha had offered mango fruit to Lord Siva at Kailas. Iswara told His two sons that He would give it to the one who returned first after going round the universe once. Immediately Lord Muruka started the race in all seriousness mounting the peacock, his *Vahana*; However, Vinayaka went round his Parents once and got the fruit saying that the Lord symbolises the universe. Lord Muruka was furious after his return. Siva and Parvathi tried to pacify him saying: "Thou art thyself the fruit (of all knowledge and wisdom); why need one?" But Muruka was not consoled; he left Kailash, came to *Tiru-Avinam-Kudi* near the present Palani Hill and stayed there for some time; afterwards he came to the Hill at Palani where he stays for ever to bless his devotees. Palani is thus said colloquially "**Pazham nee**". There is also another *Purana* which accounts for the existence of the Hill at Palani. After worshipping *Siva Giri* and *Sakthi Giri* at Mount Kailash, Sage Agastya came to the South. On his way he met Idumba Asura and his wife. The Sage bade the Asura to carry off the two hills and reach *Podhiya Malai*, where he lived. Accordingly Idumba lifted the hills and bore them on his strong shoulders in the form of a *Kavadi* (The two hills hung from his shoulders on either side held by a *Danda* and ropes). While nearing Palani, he felt fatigued and laid the load on the ground to rest. He found them immovable when he tried to lift it again. He got enraged, turned round and saw Lord Muruka disguised as a boy standing under a *Kura Tree*. He asked him to leave the Hill; the Boy replied that all hills were his dwelling places. Idumbasura then pounced on Muruka; The Lord then threw his baton-staff on him and the Asura fell lifeless at his divine adversary's feet. Idumbi, the Asura's wife, then begged Muruka for his mercy and Idumba was restored to life. It was then that *Idumba* prayed for two boons: By one, he was permitted to be the Gate keeper in all temples of Murka; by the other, he earned the blessings of the Lord for all who offer vows with the *Kavadi* (the method adopted by him to bring the hills). The Goddess Lakshmi,

Surya Deva, Bhudevi and Agni Deva attained the blessings of Muruka by worshipping Him here.

The *Tiru Vilayadal Puranam* refers to the form of Pig assumed by Lord Siva in His boundless mercy for the motherless young ones of a pig. He is said to have fed them with milk. It is said that the incident took place near Palani hills.

The Shanmuga river flows at a distance of 2½ miles from the hill. The lake is the *Tirtha* of the place. There are many festivals conducted here; the most holy days are the *Visaka* day in *Vaikasi*, the *Sasthi* of *Aippasi*, the *Kritika* day of *Karthikai*, the *Pusa* day of *Tai* and the *Uttra* day of *Panguni*' Besides, there are many festivals celebrated every month on the *Kritika Sashti*, *Visaka* and new-moon days. Naturally there is a perennial stream of pilgrims to this place. Thousands of them go round the hill during the first half of *Chitrai*, the second half of *Vaikasi* and on the day of *Agni Nakshatra*. The *Panguni Uttiram* festival draws lakhs of people from all parts of South India.

The history of Palani dates back to the distant past; there are references to the place in Tamil classies which show that the **Sthala** must have been in existence even some two thousand years ago. The *Tiru Muruka Atruppadai* written by Nakkirar of the first Century A.D., pays homage to Palani in unforgettable words: (126-176). He says that the devotees of Lord Muruka who worship him here noted for their holy penance and purity of body, heart and soul; they have many days of fasting; they are passionless and learned; they are devoid of desires, being detached in their outlook. They live in peace and eternal bliss with no trace of Sorrow. Thus Nakkirra shows the characteristics of ture *Bakthas*.

Sri Jagadeesa Iyer has beautifuly described the glories of Lord Subramanya or Muruka as found in one of the inscriptions of the place. He says:

> "The son of Sri Paramesvara, who burned the Triphuvanas, the God of Gods; the Lord of the *Daiva* (divine world); the Lord of the vast Universe which has many *Karors* of words under it; the Kumara, who argued with the Lord of the Swans (Brahma), and, after cuffing him on his head and pushing him out by his lock, gave him his Brahma-ship; the brave commander who comes riding on his beacock, which is as terror-striking as the battle-field of the *Asuras*, where the horse chieftains whirl amidst the tumultuous cry of trumpets, and the *Asura*'s blood collects in pools, turning the place into a very burning-ground; the Kumara of the cock-banner, who, shouting tn the battle-field, tore (to

pieces) the bodies of the *Asuras* without falling into the hands of the many by-standers; the warrior that has (commands) the shining army of the Kulis that are bawling and the Kukais and other devils that are bawling; the brave soldier that has taken up the beautiful javeline in the cause of the weak and the old; the Commander of the Devas who liberated Indra that cut the mountains, the trees of which extended to the skies; the possessor of the emerald-coloured peacock-which shines as it were the ill-luck of the Tisira as his vehicle; the moon (Subrahmanya) born in the *Yaga* (sacrifice) which Narada bred up (kindled), and who came to burn Tirupurakodu; he who taught Agastya the pure classic Tamil, the Agamas and the truth of the six letters; he who by his power gave happiness to the *Dehnu* (cow); he who acted so that the Sun might see his path; he who granted the promised boon to the Vani (Sarasvati); he who gave life and happiness to the mountain-daughter-(Parvati); the slaughterer of the *Asuras*; the guard of Amaravati: he who has for his vehicle the peacock of the flowing tail which shines like gold; the nephew of Sridhara (Vishnu); Siva-Subrahmanya the fierce destroyer; the exceedingly fierce (god); the clamorous (god); the bold Kumara; the Lord of the 600 Holy Places of Pattamangalam, Avinangudi, Palani and others; he who is fond of devotees; the possessor of the mountain on which live the devotees; the son of Parvati; the sun of Siva-Ganapati himself; the Lord (breaker) of all obstacles; the brother of all the Gods; the supreme javelin-armed God (Velayudhasvami), the God of all the gods, and the javelin-armed God Subrahmanya of the Palani mountain, who sits amidst worship, in the holy places celebrated in songs,-in Tirupparankunram, Siralavay, Avainankudi, Erkalam, and Palamudir-Solai, among the mountains, the six Tiruppatis, otherwise called Yagapati, Tillai, Tiruvannamalai, Tirukkalatti, Tiruttani, Tiruvenkatam and Tirupadi".

There are many inscriptions belonging to the periods of Pandyas, Cholas, and Rayas of Vijayanagar. (14th and 15th centuries). The *Garbagritha* and the middle *Mantap* are said to have been built by Cheraman Perumal Nayanar who was a friend of Sundarar (9th Century). The temple is situated on the top of the hill. A flight of steps cut on the hill leads to it. The *Palani Andavar* is seen in the standing posture in the *Sannadhi*. More than a hundred times a day, many kinds of *Abishekas* are conducted and the devotees offer milk, *Vibuti*, *Panchamirtha* and honey for *Abisheka*. There are prescribed charges for the different *Abishekas*. The *Panchamirtha* of Palani is well-known as *Prasada*; similar is the sanctity attached to the *Vibuti* prasada.

Palani hill is part of the Kodai Hills and the station is on the Dindigul-Podanur section. The foot of the hill is at a distance of one mile from the station. There are also buses plying from Madurai, Coimbatore and Dindigul. There are many choultries and a few hotels which cater to the needs of pilgrims. Thousands of pilgrims, especially Keralites and Tamils visit this place for woship every day and it is a common sight to see *Kavadi* borne by devotees.

Recently Arts Colleges have been started here with the temple funds. Many students are admitted free of charges to the courses where there is a greater stress on religion and oriental studies.

Arunagirinathar has composed many exquisite hymns on this sthala. Most of them are sung by the devotees everyday here.

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25. TIRUMAAL IRUM CHOLAI

(Alagar Kovil)

This *Sthala* is situated thirteen miles northeast of Madurai at the foot of the high range of hills called Alagar Malai. There are many other names to the place such as *Uttirana Sailam, Vana Giri, Vrisha Badri, Irunkunram, Maal Irum Kunram, Tirumaal Kunram, Alankaran Kunram, Alagar Malai, Solai Malai, Pazhamudir Solai, Tirumaal Irum Solai, Then Tiruppathi etc.* Some of the earliest Sanskrit and Tamil works speak of the glory of Alagar malai and the *Sthala* is one of the ancient places of Tamil Nadu. The *Mahabharata* says that Dharma came to *Vrishabadri* on his pilgrimage for the holy bath; The *Vamana Purana* shows how Yama and Markandeya worshipped Alagar and refers also to the *Noopura Gangai.* Arjuna, says the *Agneya Purana,* came to the Hills here for worship. Moreover, the Brahmandapurana, Varahapurana, Alasya Manmiyam and Skandapurana also contain references to the *Sthala.* The *Sthala Purana* known as *Vrushabadri Mahatmyam* has all the materials drawn from the various *Puranas.* Even in the early days of the Sangam Age Alagarkoil must have attracted pilgrims and the famous Tamil work *Pari Padal*, and the epic *Silappathikaram* also mention this place. Thus the antiquity of the *Sthala* is beyond question.

Many are the Alwars who had visited the place and sung in praise of the Deity in their hymns. Budattalwar, Nammalwar, Perialwar, Andal, Tirumangai-Alwar are some of them. It is also said to be one of the six

Padai Veedu of Lord Muruka. Arunnagirinathar has sung of the Lord in his *Tiruppugazh*, there are 29 hymns dedicated to the Lord. The works speaking the glory of Alagar are Pillai Perumal Ayyangar's *Alagar Anthathi*, Kavi Kala Rudra's *Alagar Pillai Tamil*, Kavi Kunjaram Ayyar's *Alagar Kalambagam*, Pala pattadaic Chockanatha Pillai's *Alagar Killai Vidu Thoothu* and Kavi Kunjara Barathiyas's *Solai Malai Kuravanji*. Moreover, there are certain other writings also which honour the Lord of the sthala such as *Ramanuja Nootru Anthathi, Nootru Ettu Tiruppathi Anthathi, Sadagopar Anthathi, Kovil Ozhuhu, the Skanda Puranan* etc.

Those who worship the Alagar Hills will get their wishes fulfilled. Being the favourite Deity of ths Kallar Community living here, the Lord is called *Kallazhagar*; Some of the other names equally popular are Alagar, Sundararajar, Alankarar, Solaimalaikkarasar, Deivasikamani, Paramaswami, Malai Alankarar, Vrushabadrinathar etc. The Goddess is called *Soundravalli* or Kalyana sundara valli. The *Utsava* idol is Alagar; it is a beautiful idol made of a superior variety of gold called *Aparanji*. The *Abishekam* for the idol is conducted with the water of *Noopura Gangai*, the holy spring on the hill 1000 feet high. It is said that the idol changes colour and becomes black if water from any other source is used; it is also said that some forty years ago beads of perspiration were found on the idol during summer.

King Mahabali the grandson of Prahlada became all powerful as the ruler of the three worlds as a result of his penance and Lord Vishnu incarnated as *Vamana* and transformed into *Tiruvikrama* to put an end to the King's powers. The *Sthalapurana* says that Lord Vishnu as *Tiruvikrama* raised one of his feet above; Brahma in Satya Loka washed His Father's foot with the water in the *Kamandala*; thus the *Silambaru* or *Noopura Gangai* is said to have originated. Those who bathe in it for twelve days continuously are said to attain *Mukthi*. Bathing facilities are available in the mantap at the summit where the spring is seen. Some of the other names of the tirtha are *Then-Aru, Manchira Nadhi*. The other tirthas on the Hills are Hanuma tirtha, Garuda tirtha, Pancha pandava tirtha, the Big falls, Uthira Narayana Vavi, Venu tirtha, Krishna vavi, Narayana Pushkarani, Agni vavi etc. There is a tradition that one *Rakkayi Ammal* is the Presiding Deity of all the tirthas. The *Sthala Vrutcha* is the banyan tree.

Perialwar is said to have explained the glories of the *Sthala* to his daughter Andal. Some of the hymns of Perialwar dedicated to the Lord of the Place are remarkable for felicitious expression and deep devotional fervour. The glories of the Silambaru, the heavenly bliss enjoyed by the

women who bathe in it, the paean of songs sung by them in their gratefulness the throng of sages and Devas around the tirtha, the situation of Alagar Hill in the midst of the high range of hills etc. are all exquisitly summed up in the songs of Perialwar. To quote one of them:

cilampu aarkkavantu teyvamakalir ootum ciire
cilampaaṟu paayum teṉtirumaalirun coolaiyee

(Perialwar)

There are many festivals conducted in the temple in all the months of of the year. The Chitra festival is the most famous and important. The Utsvar is taken in procession to Madurai in a large palanquin, halting at the several mantaps erected on the way. This festival attracts thousands of pilgrims from all parts of Madurai District. It takes place for nine days and on the Full Moon Day Kallazhakar reaches the banks of the river Vaigai and this festival, one of the biggest in the State, attracts literally lakhs of people. It is a day prior to this that the Tirukalyanam of Meenakshi of Madurai is also conducted. It is said that these two festivals were first celebrated in different months of *Masi* and *Chitrai* and that Tirumalai Nayak (1623-59 A.D.) it was who ordered that the Tirukalyanam festival should coincide with the visit of Kallazhagar to Madurai in Chitrai. It is indeed a remarkable sight to see Alagar on horse back carried on the sands of Vaigai. On all the three days of *Ethir Sevai*, *Arril irangal* and *Dasavatharam*, the city of Madurai puts on a gay appearance with lakhs of people who throng to worship Meenakshi and Alagar.

Some 120 inscriptions of the temple have been published by the Government. They are in Brahmi, Vatteluthu, Tamil, Telugu and Grantha scripts. Krishna deva Raya of Vijayanagar is seen to have stayed here for three days. The ivory figures made by Tirumalai Nayak show exquisite workmanship.

The pilgrims stay at Madurai and reach the place by bus. There is a good motorable road leading to the village. As the name of the place itself suggests, the place, situated at the foot of hills, offers some beautiful scenery to the visitors.

26. TIRUPARANKUNDRAM

This is one of the fourteen *Sthalas* of Pandya nadu, situated at a distance of about 5 miles southwest of Madurai. Nakkirar refers to the place in his *Tirumurukatru Padai* as being *West* of Madurai. In his *Skanda Purana* Kacchiyappa Siva Acharyar also says the same regarding the position of the *Sthala.* The hill is also called *Tiruparan Giri, Ganda Maadanam* and *Kanda Malai.* It is know to Muslims as *SikhandarMalai*; there is also a mosque on the top of the hill.

The *Sthala* is the third station from Madurai Junction and the temple is just two furlongs from the station. There are many choultries here; however as the city of Madurai is nearby and as there is an excellent bus service, most of the pilgrims stay at Madurai, visit the place for worship and return.

Lord Siva is called here *Pazham Giri Nathar.* Sundarar of the ninth century sings how the three rulers of Tamil Nadu—the Chola, the Chera and the Pandya-came here to offer worship together. The temple is at the foot of the hill and it is a rock-cut temple; whole structure is hollowed out with pillars, platforms and inner shrines.

The *Skandapuranam* says that it was here that Lord Muruga married Deivayanai. The figures of the Lord and the Goddess as Bridegroom and Bride are beautifully carved on the rock itself. Thus we have to go round the hill to go round the Lord for worship.

The *Asthana Mantap* in front of the Swami is full of beautiful sculptures all of which portray *Puranic* episodes.

The *Moolasthana* is indeed an inspiring sight. At a little height are seen Muruga, Deivayanai and Sage Narada; the Divine Marriage is conducted. The Sun God and the Moon God shower flowers on the couple. Nearby we find the Sannadhi of Durgai and the Sannadhi of Karpaka Vinayakar. Next we see the Sannadhi of *Paran Kundra Nathar* facing east. Opposite the Siva sannadhi we find the Sannadhi of *Pavazha Kani Vay Perumal* (Lord vishnu),

Thus standing before Lord Muruga, we can worship all the Deities at the same time. On the rocks of the Hill we find numberless figures carved with exquisite skill, all depicting scenes from *Puranas.*

The pristine glory of the temple is evidenced the ancient works of Tamil Nadu like the writings of Sangam period, Madurai Kanchi, Kalitthokai, Akananoor, Tirumurugatruppadai, Pari padal, Thevaram, Tirupugazh, Skandapuranam, etc.

There are two tirthas on the hill called *Saravana* tirtha and *Kasi Sunai* (Sunai = Pond). The Lord of the *Sthala* is *Parangirinathar* or *Paran-Kunru-Isar*; The Goddess is called *Avudai Nayaki.*

The *Sthala Purana* says that it was here that Nakkirar sang his *Tirumurukatru Padai,* that the Emperor Sibi made a grant of lands to Lord Siva, and that Harischandra attained *Mukthi* by worshipping the Lord. There is also a tradition that a girl who lived here was suspected of faithlessness by her husband as she was always repeating the name of Muruka; the angry husband cut off one of her hands and it is said that by the grace of Lord Muruka, the deformed limb grew into full shape.

The circumstances under which Nakkirar sang the *Tirnmurugatru Padai* are said to be as follows: When Nakkirar once failed in performing *Siva-Pooja*, a *Butha* or a giant captured him and imprisoned him in a cave. It was then he implored the blessings of Lord Muruga by singing the *Tirumurugatru Padai* and the Lord appeared before him, deft the rock and released him. The place where he worshipped the Lord is called *Panchatchara Parai* and a long streak on the rock is also shown as the sign of cleavage on the hill.

Some of the other *Tirthas* in the Sthala are Satya Koopa and Brahma Koopa. On every *Krithika* day, thousands of people come the temple for worship from Madurai and elsewhere. The Panguni *Uttiram* festival is conducted on a grand scale.

One of the inscriptions in the temple is a historical important. It says that in Salivahana Sahapta 1714 (1792-A. D.), an army of the westerners reached the *Mantap* opposite the temple after having damaged the Madurai temple and the Palani Andavar temple; When the soldiers tried to reach the Kalyana mantap, the *Gurukals* made one 'Kutti' go up the tower and asked him to jump. He jumped but received no injury and the army retured on seeing it! Kutti later received grants of lands from the temple authorities as a reward of his indomitable courage.

As we go round the hill we find another temple called *Then Paran Kundram* (South Parankunram) being the Muruka temple. This temple is said to be older; but the archaeologists point out that this belongs to the Pallava period. It must be remembered that many Jain ascetics stayed in caves around Madurai and perhaps this was also a cave of the Jains.

On the top of the hill are situated the temples of *Pillayar* and *Kasi Viswanathar*. As we go up the hill, we find the figures of Siva, Parvathi and Pillayarar. But normally nobody ascends the hill for worship. The pilgrims offer worship only at the Muruka temple.

As we have already seen the place is noted for its antiquity. One of the passages in *Paripadal* written some 1800 years ago says how many musicals notes spring from the hill:

RAMANADAPURAM DISTRICT

27. RAMESWARAM

(Dhanushkodi)

Rameswaram is situated on an island in the south-east corner of Ramnad District. It is one of the most important religous centres in India for all Hindus; the *Sthala* is in the northern part of the island which is said to represent the form of Lord Vishnu's conch *Paanchajanya*. After having killed Ravana and other *Asuras* Rama came to this island with Sita and stayed for some time on Mount *Kandamadana*. He wanted to expiate the sin of *Brahma Hathi* (Ravana was a descendant of Brahma). He bade Hanuman to bring a *Siva Linga* from Mount Kailas; Hanuman took a long time to return with the *Linga*. Rama who was eager to do the *Prathishta* of a Linga at the auspicious time ordered Sita to form a *Linga* of sand, and then offered *Poojas* to it. Thus goes the *Purana* regarding the origin of Rameswaram. The Lord is also called Ramalingar or Ramanathar. The place also come to be called after the Iswara. The Linga that was later fetched by Hanumar is seen north of Rameswarar; when Hanuman became angry with Rama, the latter did the *Prathishta* of the other Linga also to pacify him. This Deity is called Visweswarar,—*Kasilingam* or *Hanuma Lingam*. The Goddess is called *Parvathavardhani* or *Malaivalar Kathali*. There is also another Sannadhi of *Sethu madava* which is euqally popular.

There are many references to the *Sthala* in both Sanskrit and Tamil works. The Rig Veda, Taitriy Sambita, Valmiki Ramayana, Adyatma Ramayana, Ananda Ramayana, Agneya purana, Baghavata Purana, Padma purana, Siva purana, Kurma purana, Skanda Purana, Brahmanda purana, Matsya Purana, Manu's Smruthi, Kalava smruthi, Ganthama sruthi, Parasara Smruthi are some of the ancient Sanskrit works containing reference to the *Sthala*. Among Tamil works, the *Thevarvm. Tiruppugaze, The Songs of Taayumanavar, Thiruvilayadal Purauam* and other separate

pieces also contain referenees to the place. Saint Appar prayed God here and his hymn runs this:

vaakiṉaal inpuraittu vaalkilaar tammaiellaam
pookkiṉaar putaittavarkal uyirtaṉai untu maal taaṉ
teekkuniir ceytakooyil tiruiraameeccarttai
nookkiṉaal vaṇankuvaarkku nooyviṉai nuṇukumaaree

(Appar)

Ramalinga is said to be one of the twelve manifestations of Siva at *Jyotir Linga.* It is of special interest to note that the holy water of the Ganges is used every day for performing *Abishekam* to the Linga.

The Tambala inscription in Ceylon speaks of Parakrama Bahu, a King of Ceylon who conquered the Pandyas and raised a temple in 1173 at Rameswaram as a mark of his victory. The *Praharas* of the Rameswaram temple are universally known as an example of massive architectnre in Dravidian style. The vast corridors are 4000 feet long and 17 to 21 fees broad and the ceiling is 30 feet high; they run round the temple between huge colonnades on a plarform.

There are twenty two *Tirthas* in the temple of which Mahalakshmi, Savitri, Gayatri and Saraswati are the most important. Of the twenty two *Tirthas,* fourteen exists as tanks and the rest are wells. In addition to them, the sea near the eastern tower of the temple is also called Agni tirtha. The Rama tirtha and Lakshmana tirtha at some distance in the west tower street are also equally famous.

Mount Kandamadana is some two miles north of Ramanathar temple. There is a fine structure at the top of a sand hill. The holy footprints of Sri Rama are worshipped there. It is said that Hanumar stationed himself here and measured the sea before crossing it.

In and around Rameswaram there are said to be 64 *Tirthas.* The most sacred of them all is *Sethu* or *Dhanushkodi.* Rama is said to have begun blocking up the sea from here to reach Ceylon; as he stationed one *End* of his *Kothanta* or Bow on the sands here, the place came to be called *Dhanush-Kodi*; another interpretation is that the place is situated at corner the land resembling one end of a bow. It is at this place where the *Maho Dati* (the Bay of Bengal) and the *Ratnakaram* (The Indian Ocean) meet. Thousands of of people visit Dhanushkodi on the new moon day in Adi and Thai for purificatory bath in the sea. On the auspicious days of *Arthodaya* and *Mahodaya,* Ramanathar comes to *Sethu* accompanied by the five Deities and

the *Tirthavari* takes place early in the morning; lakhs of people assemble on this occasion to worship Ramanathar. The **Sethu Purana** says that any one, who praises Dhanuskodi or thinks of it or sees it, is sure of salvation or *Mukthi*. There are no prescribed days or periods for taking bath in the holy sea here. Naturally there is a perennial flow of pilgrims to the place.

The **Maha sivarathri** festival in the month of *Masi* is also famous; the Tirukkalyana festival is conducted in *Adi* and in *Ani* the *Prathishta* festival of Ramalinga is also celebrated in a splendid manner.

It is well-known that a visit to Kasi or Varanasi should be usually followed by a visit to Rameswaram. The pilgrims who return from Varanasi offer the holy water of the Ganges for *Abisheham* in the temple. Usually the pilgrims go to the *Uppur Vinayagar* temple situated north of Ramnad on their way to Rameswaram; After offering worship there, the *Nava Pashna* is worshipped at Devipattinam; then they reach Dhanushkodi and take the holy bath; thus they reach the temple of Ramanathar for worship. While they return they take the holy bath at the *Adi Sethu* the sea south of Ramnad, worship *Tharpa Sayanam* of Lord Vishnu at Tiruppullani and witness the *Ramalinga Vilasa* in the palace of the Ramnad King.

As Rameswaram is situated on an island there is no normal means of transport like the cart etc. We can reach the place by train from Pamban junction which in turn can be reached by train from Mandapam. The temple is at a short distance form the station. There are many guides and others to take the pilgrims to the numerous *Tirthas*. Numberless are the choultries here. It is a common sight to see hundreds of pilgrims thronging here from the north every day. A visit to Varanasi is not complete unless accompanied by a visit to Rameswaram; hence its unique glory and importance, as a unifying force. The rulers of Ramnad have made plenteous grants of lands to the temple. They used to visit the place on all important occasions and offer wership to Ramanathar. There are many inscriptions which largely speak of their charitable endowments. Of course all of them belong to recent times; all of them date from the Sixteenth century. Some of them show how some rulers of Ramnad defeated the later Maratta rulers of Thanjavur. One of the inscriptions refers to the *Hiranya Garba Dana* of Tirumalai Raghunatha Sethupathi at Dhanushkodi on 12-1-1659. (This means the gift of a golden cow to brahmins). The inscriptions of the eighteenth century show how the authorities of the temple came to Madras to pay tributes to the Nawab and the Rayas of Vijayanagar. The rulers of Ramnad are also seen to have conquered Jaffna.

There are many forms of worship followed here. From the Ordinary *Deepa Aradhana* to the big festivals and *Abishekas,* numberless offerings are made to suit the purse of the pilgrims.

Dhanushkodi is the southern terminus of the Railway. On the Dhanushkodi Pier, trains draw up by the side of the Railway ferry ship enabling tourists and pilgrims to get into the ship for going to Ceylon. Now this system has been transferred to Rameswaram.

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28. SRIVILLIPUTTUR

Srivilliputtur is one of the eighteen most sacred *Vaishnava Sthalas* in the Southern part of Tamil Nadu. This is known by various names such as Seevilliputtur, Seruvilliputtur, Tiruvilliputtur, Puduvai, South Puduvai etc. The inscriptions found in the temples of the place refer to certain other names as well. Some of them are Tiruvillinattu Srivilliputtur, Tirumallanattu Srivilliputtur, Tirumallinattu Srivilliputtur etc. We find many beautiful epithets attributed to this place in the exquisite hymns of Perialwar. Some of them are as follows: " *Nal Kamazh Pumbozhil* Villiputtur ", (Villiputtur full of blooming flower-gardens), " *Macchani Mada* Puduvai " (Puduvai abounding in high towers), *Niraninda Kuvalai Vasam Nikazha Narum* Villiputtur " (Villiputtur full of the fragrance of the *Kuvalai* flowers - *Kuvalai*: a water plant like the lily), *Setramilathavar Vazh Thiru Then* Puduvai " (The blessed South Puduvai where those bereft of anger dwell), " *Vandu Amar Pozhil* Puduvai ', (Puduvai with fine parks where the bees are busy), " *Sentamil Then* Puduvai " (The South Puduvai noted for chaste Tamil) and " *Veyar Pukazh* Villiputtur " (Villiputtur which was praised by Veyar). The sacred songs of Nacchiyar refer to the place as " Ponniyal Madangal Suzhnda Puduvai " (Puduvai full of golden towers) and " *Veda Vay Tozhilarkae Vazh* Villiputtur " (Villiputtur where those who recite the Vedas dwell). Perialwar says that one must have done great *Tava* (Penance) to have the good fortune of worshipping in this *Sthala.*

The place is situated at a distance of fifty miles southwest of Madurai; the railway station is on the Virudhunagar–Tenkasi section. There are many bus-routes to the place from various important cities of Tamil Nadu. Also there are many choultries with all amenities for stay. A Traveller's Bungalow caters to the need of the tourists.

Of the twelve Alwars, Perialwar and Andal were born here. The name Villiputtur is said to be derived from *Villai,* a hunter, who renovated the place. Villi's mother was called Malli; hence the name **Mallinadu.** The Lord gave *Darsan* to Mandooka Maharishi in this *Sthala.*

There are two *Sannadhis* here: one is the Sannadi of *Andal* and the other is that of *Vadabadra Sayana.* The *Vimana* of the temple is *Samsana Vimana* The Lord is called Vatapatra Sayana and Vatapatra Sayee. The *Sannadhi* faces east. In the Andal Sannadhi is found the so-called "Well of Mirror" (Kannadi Kinaru), where she is said to have seen the reflection of her divine figure adorned with garland. The Lords of the Hundred and eight *Divyadesas* (the Sacred *Vaishnava Sthalas*) are painted on the walls of the *Praharas.*

There are many inscriptions found here and in the big northern tower as well. They belong to the times of the Pandyas, the Cholas and the Rayas of Vijaya Nagar. Some passages from the *Divya Prabandas* (or divine Vaishnava hymns, which number four thousand in all, composed by the Alwars) are also inscribed on the walls. The sacred garden with the *Tulasi Mada* where Andal was said to be born is situated between the Andal temple and the Perumal temple.

The most famous festivals of the place are two in number: one is the Adi Festival (that which takes place in the month of *Adi*); the other is the festival of the Holy Bath taking place in the month of Margali. The *Car* (*Ther*) belonging to the temple is one of the biggest in Tamil Nadu. It takes even months for the car to go round the city once. *Tirumukkulam* is the *Tirtha* of the place. Certain other tirthas are *Chakra Tirtha* and *Tirupal Kadal.*

The time of Andal or Nacchiyar who was born here is not yet settled. She had an unquenchable craving and passion for Sri Ranganatha, worshipped Him as her Husband and Lover, and attained His blessings, as the Bride of Lord Vishnu Himself. Her devotional songs have a pride of place among the four thousand *Divya Prabandas.* Perialwar, her father, was also a great *Vishnu Bakthi.* He too has dedicated many hymns to the Lord. Of all the hymns of Andal, the *Tiruppavai* is the most famous. It is a collection of songs, the general theme being the devout prayer of maids who wake up early in the morning during the month of *Margali*: (December-January). After bathing in the cool water, they pray to the Lord to bless them with worthy, virtuous husbands in their lives. Thus Andal prays that Lord Ranganatha Himself should wed her. Even today, in all *Vaishnava Sthalas*

of Tamil Nadu, the *Tiruppavai* is recited at four in the morning after the **Poojas** are over in the month of Margali. Similarly the *Tiru Empavai* collection of songs with the same theme composed by Manickavasagar, is recited in Siva temples.

Vaidynathaswami Temple: The southern part of the place is called *Madavar Valakam* where there is a Siva temple with a big tower. The God of this temple is *Vaidyanathaswami* and the Devi is *Sivakami Ammal.* The *Tirtha* is *Sivaganga.* There is a big *Tiru Kalyana Mantap* in the temple, also called *Nataka Salai* Tirumalai Nayakar, the ruler of Madurai is said to have built the Mantap as a token of his deep *Bakthi* when he was relieved of his intense stomach pain by the blessings of the Lord of this place.

Alagar Koii: At a distance of ten miles from Srivilliputtur, there is another temple called *Alagar Koil* situated on a hill densely wooded. There is also a waterfall which flows with a perennial stream.

Tiru Annan Malai: There is also yet another hill-temple at a distance of two miles from Srivilliputtur. Here Venkatesa Perumal is seen in the standing posture. The place is called *Tiru Annan Malai.* Around the hill is found the *Koneri* spring.

TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

29. TIRUNELVELI

The city of Tirunelveli is situated near the River Tambraparani or *Than Porunai Nadi* which is the source of agricultural wealth of the southern Districts of Tamil Nadu. Tirunelveli is one of the eighteen *Tirupathis* of Pandya Land immortalised by th: Nayanars in their sacred hymns. Some of the other names of the *Sthala* are *Venu Vanam, Nelveli, Nellur, Saliveli, Salivadi, Salinagar, Brahma Vridha Puram, Tharukavanam* etc. It is also called *Seppari* for one of the five *Ambalams*, the *Tambra Saba* was here where the Lord did *Tandava.* The term *Nelveli* in derived from the **Purana** that the Lord protected the granary where paddy was stored for His worship by fencing it around, thereby preventing the floods of the river from reaching it. The *Sthalapurana* says that a brahmin, Veda Sanman by name, had spread the paddy on the floor for drying up when the floods came. It was then that Lord Siva raised a fence around the paddy and thus obstructed the floods; hence to the name Tirunelveli. It is also said that the name is dervied

from the fact that the *Sthala* is surrounded by fertile fields of paddy on all sides. The inscriptions of the temple refer to the *Sthala* as *Kulasekara Chathurvedi Mangalam of East Vembu Nadu.*

The names of the Lord in Tirunelveli are Nellaiyappar, Venuvananathar, Nelveli nathar, Salivatisar and Veymutha nather. The *Tiruvilayadal Puranam* shows that the Lord is called *Veymutha Nathar* for He manifested himself in a *Bamboo.*

The Goddess is called *Kanthimathi Amman* and *Vadivudai Amman.* The inscriptions refer to the Lord as *Tirunelveli Udayar* or *Udaya Nayanar* and the Goddess is called *Tiru-Kama Kottam Udaya Nachiyar.* The *Thevaram* of Sambandar refers to them as Tirunelveli Urai Selvar and Vadivudai mangaiyar.

There are separate *Sannadhis* for the God and the Goddess. The figure of the Goddess is full of divine grace; the tower of the Amman Sannadhi was built in 1626. First we see the Amman ambalam, then the Unchal Mantap; it is here we see 96 pillars-symbolising the nintysix principles of conduct and life. The *Tirukalyana* mantap or the thousand pillared mantap is 520' long and 63' broad. The *Tirukalyana* festival and *Chengol* festival are conducted here in *Aippasi* and on the *Uttiram* day in *Panguni* respectively. There are other wonderful *Mantaps* like *Vasantha Mantap* and *Sangili Mantap.* The tirthas in the temple are the *Pon Tamarai* and *Karumari Tirtha.* There are two monolithic 'musical' pillars, each carved into big column in the middle surrounded by intricately carved pillars of varied sizes. When tapped lightly, columns emanate notes of music. The sculptures and the idols in the temple are noted for their beauty and intricate patterns evincing fine workmanship.

The figure of Ravana is seen holding Mount Kailas on his head, in the south *Prahara.* The Tambra Saba in the West Prahara is worth seeing. There is also here the Sanadhi of Sailappa Nathar.

It is said that a Muslim Chieftain established a Linga in the temple when he found his wife was cured of her illness by praying to the Lord. The Linga is called today Anavarada Nathar. It is also said that the *Linga* worshipped by *Anwar-Udin-Khan* came to be known as Anavardanathan in course of time!

There are 32 tirthas in the the Sthala, of which 9 are important. The *Tirthas*—Porrtamarai, Karumari, Vairava Tirtha, Sarva Tirtha are found inside the temple. Kambai, Teppakulam, Sindhu Poonthurai, Durga Tirtha and Kuruku thurai are outside the temple. The *Sthala Vritcha* is the bamboo tree.

A grand festival is conducted in **Ani**. The temple of Muruka and Kurukuthurai tirtha are in the midst of the river Tambraparani. Both the towers of Swami and Amman *Sannadhis* were first built by Mudukanda Rama Pandya and later by Ninra Seer Nedumaran of the seventh century. There are many inscriptions of which the oldest date back to 950 A.D., the time of Veera Pandiya. The other inscriptions belong to the times of Rajarajendra I (1011-14), Kulottunga Chola I (1074-1118), Maravarma Sundara Pandiyan I (1216-35), Maravarma Sundara Pandiyan II (1238-51), and Maravarma Kulasekaran I (1314-21). All of them refer to grants of land, articles and gold for facilitating poojas etc., in the temple.

Once this town served as the capital of the Pandyas. From here we can reach Kutralam in the South, Madurai in the west and Tiruchendur in the east by Train. There are many buses running to all important cities, Kanyakumari (cape comorin) being one of them. There are many good hotels and choultries here for stay. The temple is situated at a distance of 3 miles from Tirunelveli Junction. There is a city-bus service. The town station is near the temple. It is one of the beautiful cities of Tamil Nadu, situated as it is on the banks of the Tambra parani.

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30. TIRUCHENDUR

Tiruchendur is a famous *Muruka* Sthala, situated on the sea shore in Tirunelveli District. It is the Railaway terminus of a branch line from Tirunelveli Junction and is 35 miles from Tiurnelveli and 442 miles away from Madras. The temple is about a mile from the station. Some of the other names of the *Sthala* are *Senthil, Alaivai, Tirusenthil, Tiru-Cheer-Alaivai, Tiru-Senthiloor, Jayanthipuram, Sri Santhi Nagar, Sandanachalam* etc. An inscription of Siva Kolundeesar temple refers to the place as "*Tirubuvana Madevi Chatur Vedi Mangalam*". The Sangam works call it *Senthil Alaivai*, the Thevaram calls its *Senthil* and the Tirupugazh refers to it as *Tiruchendur*. Muruka is also known by the name of *Sen Then*; the place where he dwells is *Senthu il* which became in turn *Senthil*, *Senthiloor*, *Senthur* and *Chendur*. It is also said that *Chendur* is derived from *Jayanthipuram.*

This is the second of the Six sacred temples (**Aru padai veedhu**) dedicated to Lord Muruka. The *Skanda Purana* says that he who worships the *Sthala* has himself become *Muruka.* It says that after having killed Tarakasura by cleaving the Kirouncha mountain, Lord Subramanya came to Senthil and bade

Devakama to erect the temple. After destroying *Soora Padma* and Asuras at *Veeramahendra*, Arumugha came here to the temple and worshipped Lord Siva. The *Linga* worshipped by Him is found in the *Moolasthana*. This is one of oldest temples referred to in *Ahananooru*, *Purananooru*, *Silappathikaram*, *Tirumurukatrupadai* and *Tirupugazh*.

Kumaraguruparar was born dumb and when he was five years old, his parents brought him here and worshipped the Lord. The child was relieved of the deformity by the grace of Subrahmanya and he began singing the famous *Kandar Kali Venba* which begins:

puumeevu ceṅkamalap putteelum—teerariya
paameevu teyvap palamaraiyum (Kantar Kalivenpa)

Also, there was a Vaishnava, Pahazhi Koothar by name, who lived at *Sanyasi Graman* near Ramnad and he suffered intensely from chronic stomach ache. He worshipped the Lord of the *Sthala* and was relieved of his trouble; then he composed the *Tiruchendur Pillai Tamil*, in honour of Arumugha. Sri Natha Desika of Tiruvavaduthurai Adheenam has composed a book called *Tiru Chendil Kalambakam*. There are many other works on the *Sthala* like *Tiruchendil Neerottaga yamaka Anthathi* of *Turaimangalam* Siva Prakasar, *Tiruchendur Ahaval* of Tiruchitrambala Nadikal, the *Sthala Purana* of Venrimalai Kavirayar, *Kanda vaika Chanda Venba* of Saravana Perumal Kavirayar, the songs of Pamban Swami found in *Tiruvalangal Tirattu*, *Tiruchendur Kovai* of Sarkarai *Pulavar*, *Tiruchendur Nondi Natakam* of Kandasamy *Pulavar*, *Tiruchendur Prabandas* of Dhandapani Swami, *Tiruchendur Parani*, *Tiruchendilarasu*, *Tiruchendil Anthathi*, *Tiruchendil venba*, *Masilamani Malai* etc. Adi Sankara has also dedicated Subramanya Bujanga Stotra to the Lord.

The *Sthalapurana* accounts for the birth of Valli in the hunters' community. She was already his first wife; his second wife was Devayanai. Valli illtreated the second wife and Muruka is said to have cursed her to be born in a low community. When Valli implored the Lord for mercy, he told that she would be born as the daughter of one *Kanchana*, a *Deva Kannika*, in disguise as a deer on earth and that she would be brought up by hunters and in course of time he would himself come to marry her. The Hunters were also *Gandarvas* born so as a result of the curse of *Hema Rishi*. Thus goes the *Sthalapurana*.

Those who worship the Lord here are assured of the grace of God and *Mukthi*; and they are relieved of all sins like *Brahmahathi Dosha*. Here it was that sage Narada saw the *Visivaroopa* of Lord Subramanya; it is said that Narada brought Lord Vishnu and His devotees in Vaikunda to the *Sthala* to worship the *Visivaroopa*. There is a tradition that Brahma also does penance

here (bidden by Siva) to have his fifth head restored to him. Indra worshipped the Lord and was freed from his sins. Childless Athithi Devi had issues by the grace of the Lord. A muslim villain who had committed murders took refuge here, worshipped Muruka and attained *Moksha.* Thus the *Sthala Purana* gives glorious accounts of the powers of Subramanya enshrined here.

There are separate *Sannadhis* for Valli and Deivayanai in the inner *Prahara.* As we approach the temple, we first meet the Sannadhi of *Tundukai Vinayakar.* There is a huge *Mantap* known as Shanmuga Vilas mantap through which we enter the temple. Near the shore temple of Subramanya, the eastern and northern walls of which touch the waver of the Gulf of Mannar, there is a cave temple in the northen direction and we find the figure of Valli here. The cave is called *Valli Valarntha Valanadu.* Opposite Shanmuga vilas mantap, there are 24 tirthas on the shore including *Vadaramba.* The *Tiruchendur Sthalapurana* refers to 9 tirthas such as *Skanda Pushkarani, Deivayanai Tirtha, Vellai Varana Tirtha, Vairava Tirtha, Kura Kodi Tirtha, Pavanasa Tirtha, Sethu Tirtha* and *Dasa Gangai Tirtha.* About 200 yards away in the south of the temple we find a well called *Nazhi Kinaru*, a small well encircled by a bigger one. It occupies an area of 1 square foot and is 7 feet deep. It is always filled with water and the water level never recedes. So near the sea that there is a well supplying drinking water is something remarkable. A bath with the well water is said to cure all diseases.

The *Vasanth Vizha* or the *Spring Festival* conducted in Vaikasi for ten days is the most important. *Annabisheka* takes place in *Chitrai.* The *Soora Samhara Festival* takes place in Ayppasi and the Tirukalyanam of Valli is celebrated in *Uttiram* day in Panguni. Thousands of people worship the Lord on these occasions.

The large monolythic figure of Lord Subramanya seated on a Peacock is quite remarkable. Arunagirinathar also is enshrined separately in the temple. The *Tiruneeru* (the sacred ash) is given in *Pannir* leaves in the temple. The priests of the temple belong to the *Potthi* or *Tirisutandarar* or *Mukkaniyar* Community. The rites of worship differ from those followed in other temples of Tamil Nadu.

There are 4 inscriptions in the temple. Two of them belong to the time of Varaguna Maran Pandya. The third belongs to the time of Maravarma and the fourth to the time of Vikrama Pandya Deva. The inscriptions refer to Muruka as *Tiruchendil Subramanya Pillayar.* Another says that there was a shrine of Nakkira Deva nayanar inside the temple. They refer to grant of land and 1400 gold coins for conducting festivals and poojas.

In 1648 A.D. Some Dutch merchants took away the idol of Arumugha Nayanar and tried to melt it imagining it to be made of gold. There was a cyclone and the frightened merchants threw the idol into the Sea. One Vadamalayappap Pillayan who came to know of it went on the sea sailing in catamaram, recovered the idol and installed it in the temple in 1653. He also raised the mantap and made many endowments. M. Reunaul, a French writer, says that he came to know of the episode from a Dutch sailor in Germany in the year 1785. In 1803 S. R. Looshington, a Collector of Tirunelveli, gited some silver vessels to the temple.

There are many choultries here; some of which belong to the temple itself. Only small charges are collected for stay. There are no big hotels. Arunagirinathar sings that even fate was averted by worshipping Lord Subramanya.

The "Chendur Murugan Pillai Tamil" composed by Pahazhi Koothar is a fine piece of work. It is steeped in religious fervour and Lord Muruga himself is said to be moved by listening to it.

KANIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

31. KANYAKUMARI (CAPE COMORIN)

Cape Comorin is the anglicised name for *Kanyakumari* meaning "The Virgin Goddess". This the land's end of India situated 8·4° north of the Equator. 'Periplus' written in 96 A. D. refers to the place as a flourishing port. Ptolemy (140 A. D.) calls the place "Komaria" in his book of geography.

Kanyakumari is noteworthy for its unique junction of the three Seas the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. The *Sthalapurana* speaks of Parasurama who raised a temple for *Devi* or Goddess *Sakthi* and worshipped here. The Goddess is also called Bagavathi. There are historical records to show that *Nanjil Nadu* near Kanyakumari was ruled successively by the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Cheras and the Naiks. The *Silappadikaram* and the *Divakaram*, the ancient classics of Tamil Nadu, refer to the titles of the Pandya Kings the prefix of which was **Kumari—Kumari Turaivan, Kumari** Talaivan etc. One of the inscriptions says how-Parantaka Pandya took steps to protect *Kumarikottam* from being destroyed by the Sea. There are many inscriptions which belong to the regnal years of

Kulottunga Chola I and Butala Sri Veera Udaya Martanda Varma. Thus it is seen that Devi, the presiding Deity of the place was the family-Deity of the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Cheras and the Naiks.

There are many *Puranas* which give the reasons why Goddess Kumari remains a Virgin Goddess here. One of them says that she longed to wed Lord Siva and when her wish was not fulfilled, She chose to remain here as a virgin or (Kanya) for ever. Another says that She will remain here for a period of twelve Deluges doing penance and marry Lord Siva at the end. Subramania Barathi, the national poet, also sings of her as "the Virgin who stands at the land's end doing penance on the shore of the blue seas". The sea itself is the *Tirtha* of the place; it is called *Alaivay Tirtha* or *Sangili Tirtha*. The ancient Tamil epic *Silappadikaram* refers to one Mangattu Maraiyavan (brahmin) Madalam who visited the place and took the holy bath in the *Tirtha*. The *Manimekalai*, another epic, gives the story of Sali, wife of Apanjika a brahmin who lived at Varanasi (kasi). She is said to have come to Kanyakumari dipped in the Tirtha and thus got relieved of her sins of faithlessness to her husband. Even it is held that the holy *Abisheka* water poured on Sri *Sthanumalaya Swami* at Suchindram flows under the earth and falls into the sea here; the *Sthanu Tirtha* is said to indicate the holy place.

It was here that Swami Vivekananda did penance, seated on a majestic rock in the sea near the shore, before he left for America and pupularised Hinduism. The glittering diamond set in the nose ring worn by the Deity was once said to have made the sailors imagine it to be a lighthouse. The eastern gate of the temple is always closed so that the sailors might not lose their sense of direction by having a view of the unique nose-ring of the Goddess. However, we do not find the nose-ring at all today.

The *Poojas* in the temple differ to a large extent from those offered in other temples of Tamil Nadu. Here the *Malayala* (Kerala) form of worship is followed. The cite one example, the "tuft" (the cluster of fibres at the upper end) of coconuts offered to the Deity is always removed. The priests too are not the *Kurukals* of Tamil Nadu.

There are many choultries to facilitate the pilgrims. There are good motorable roads from Tirunelveli and Trivandrum. There are plenty of buses flying between Nagarkoil and Kanyakumari.

Guhanatha Swami Koil :

This temple is situated very near the Kumari temple. The inscriptions refer to the place as "Rajarajeswaram". Perhaps this was built in commemoration of the great conquests and victories of Rajaraja Chola.

The pilgrims and tourists find special charm in the scenery of Kanyakumari. The ravishing beauty of sun rise and sun set can both be enjoyed only in this place. The *Sangama* of the three seas impart to the place a unique glory indeed.

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

32. AVINASI

Avinasi is one of the places associated with the hymns. It is one of the seven places famous in Konku nadu (Salem & Coimbatore Districts). It is the capital of Avinasi Circle in the District of Coimbatore. It is situated eight miles away from Tirupur Rly. Station. The place is accessible by bus. It can be reached by traveling twenty three miles in a bus from Coimbatore. There are Chowltries, Mutts, travellers banglows.

It is referred to as Pukkoliyur Avinasi in Sundarar's Thevaram. Hence it is often called as 'Pukkoliyur Avinasi. Avinasi (means the indestructible), is the name of the God, from whom the place gets its name. 'Puthaz Sadayai pukkoliya Avinasi' is the description of the Lord by Sundarar. Hence the God is named as Avinasi "thou who is worth knowing Awinasiyappa". The words of Manivasagar emphasize the same. The history of the place says that the place got the Pukkoliyar because of the Devas coming and hiding here, fearing the dance of Shiva on fire at the time of Deluge. There is also another tradition which says that the place came to be called so because of a brahmin by seeking refuge or hiding inside the belly of a crocodile. The names of the presiding deity are Avinasiappar, Avinasinathar, and Thiru Avinasiaparanar. Thiru Avinasiapparanar is also the name of the writer of the history of the place. The names of the Goddess are Perangarunai Ambigai (The most graceful lady) and Karunalaya Chelvi which also means the same.

The temple is facing east. The temple tower is not completed and only the foundation remains. There are two prakarams (or verandhas) inside the temple. There are no streets around the temple. The car streets are situated separatelly. To the right of the Mandapa before the Gopuram

is the Sannidhi of selva Vinayagar facing north. Two idols dancing Ganapathi are seen in front of the Goupuram and Dwarabalagas on either side of the entrance, facing east. St. Manickavasagar and St. Sundarar are seen in a praying mood, or pose in one of the steps under the gopuram. Inside the Gopuram, Lord Vishnu is seen at the bottom right and Lord Chandra at the bottom left. As we enter, we see the big Nandi in the Sannidhi of Avinasiappar. Generally in Shiva Temples the Amman (Goddess) Sannidhi will be on the left to the Lord. But in this temple, it is on the rlght. There is a figure of a big scorpian carved on the western wall of the sanctum sanctorum of the Amman. People offer worship even to this. Outside the temple of Avinasiappar the temple of the Goddess is situated opposite to the sacred tank. In the moolasthana there is the 'padiri'. The Goddess is seen in a mood of doing penance.

There are four tanks (thirthas) in this place. The well named Kasi Ganga is inside the temple. Outside the temple on the right there is the 'Naga Kannigai Thirtham,' a well. Opposite to the temple there is the sacred tank with a mandapam in the centre. There is a big Nandi just above the entrance to the stairs. Nallaru flows fast on the north of the temple. This is referred to in the Thevaram of Sundarar. The river as it flows by opposite to the temple is called as Iravatha Thirtha. The sacred tree of the village is the Mango tree.

There are figures beautifully carved on the pillars in the Sannidhis and walls of the sanctum santorum of both the Amman and Swami temples. On the pillars of the Mandapam in front of the Swami Sannidhi one can see images of the dancing Siva, Kali, Veerabadhrar. On three of the pillars are the figures of Peria Kaliyappa Gounder and his son Sinna Kaliyappa Gounder. The inicriptions tells us that the mandapam was erected when the scrofula on the thigh of Peria Kaliyappa Gounder's son was cured completely.

A small cutting on the thigh of the figure of the son is shown as proof. On the pillars in the Mandapam before Amman temple are seen beautifully carved figures of nomads (kuravar-Kurathi) of the nayakar who had built the naga kannigai Mandapam, of his wife, of Muruga and hunter. The two lions on either side of the flight of steps appear majestically. On the lamp pillar opposite the sannidhi one can see the figures of Sundarar, a boy caught by the crocodile and the lingam in the mouth of a fish.

The Greatness of Avinashi lies in one of the incidents relating to the life of Sundaramoorthy Swamigal.

33. BHAVANI

Among the sacred places celebrated (glorified) in the hymns, those in Kongu nadu are called "The seven centres in Kongu. They are Thiruppukkoliyur Avinasi, Thirumurugan-poondi, Thiru Nana, Thrrukodimadachenganur (Thiruchengodu), Thiruvenjamakudal, Thirupandikodimudi, Thirukarivoorthiruvamalai. Today Thirunana is known as Bhavani. It is situated about ten miles north west from Erode Railway Station.

This place is on the bank of the confluence of the rivers Cauvery and Bhavani. Bhavani is one of the holy names of Goddess Parvathi. The place is known by various names. Saint Sambandar calls it Thiru Nana in his hymns. According to history, the place got the name Thirunana or Nananvur because the worshippers of the God here will not be affected by any evil or harm. The hymns say that it shall destroy the evils of those who pray there, and it shall bless them with knowledge to attain the truth. Because Kubera worshipped, it gained the name Dakshina Alagai. It is known as Parasarkshetra because Saint Parasara got salvation here. It is also known as Dakshina Badrikasrama or Badrivana because of the jujube tree being the Sthala Vriksha or sacred tree. It is often called the South Prayag since the three rivers Cauvery, Bhavani and Amuda mingle here. It is also known as Thriveni Sangam, Kudal, Thirumukkadal, South Kailas and Vakkirapuram. In the inscriptions here we find the name Thiruvanikudal. Vani is another name for Bhavani. Poet Perungunrukilar while describing the Chera King Ilancheral in Pathirupattu says that the kings body was purer and finer than the waters of the river Vani. This place because it is situated between the five hills Sangagiri, Nagagiri (Thirucengode), Mangalagiri (Perumal Malai), Vedagiri, Padma giri (The hillock seen between Cauvery and Gayatri Mantapam) gained the name as, "The Central plain or plateau between the five hills" "Panchagiri Madya Pradesam".

The Presiding deity of this place is Lord Sangameswara. Because of the location between two rivers, He is called as Nattarreswarar. In the inscription we find the name Thirunanna vudayar. The history of the place says "The eye of knowledge of Lord Siva is presiding in Nann". The holy names of the Goddess are Vedanayagi, Vedavalli, Ponnarmouli. She is called as Ponnar mozhi Ammaiyar in the inscriptions.

The sacred thirthas are Cauvery, Bhavani and Amuda Nadhi. Of these Amuda river invisibly merges with Cauvery. Outside the temple and opposite to the temple of Gayathrilinga there are the sacred tanks called

Gayatri Thirtha, Savithri Thirtha and Saraswathi Thirtha. Apart from these, there are Deva Thirtha, Chakra Thirtha, Surya Thirtha and Romasa Thirtha. On the new moon days in the months of Adi, Thai and Purattasi, on the first days of the months, on new year's day, on Sankaranthi day and on days of eclipse, numerous people come and bathe in the Gayathri Thirta and worship the deity. The Sacred tree of the place is the jujube tree. (ilandai) There are two of them in the South West corner of the temple. The grand festival is celebrated in the month of Chittirai.

From the town you can enter the temple only by the north gate. There is a tower (Gopuram) of the five 'Nilas'. Outside this tower there are the temples of Vinayaga & Hanuman facing north. Between the tower and these temples there is the Nandi Mandapa where Lord Nandi is installed. On entering the tower we see Vinayaga and Muthukumarasami on either side. Then is seen the Sannidhi of Adikesavaperumal. The idol in the moolasthanam or Sanctum sanctorum is in the standing posture with two of his conserts on either side. They are facing east. To the right of this temple we have the sannidhi of Santhanagoplalakrishna and Sundaravalli Thayar. On the left we have Sannidhi of Lord Venugopalakrishna facing south. This sacred image is wonderful in artistic value. This is supposed to have been made and installed by the king of Mysore. On the hall of Adikesavar we have the sculptures depicting the story of Ramayana. In the Thayar Sannidhi, there is a pillar carrying the majestic image of Kothandarama. In another pillar there is the image of Seetharama in the sitting posture. At his feet we have the image of Hanuman with cymbals in his hand in the mood of doing Bajan. There is an image with tiger's legs and elephant's head carrying Veena in hand.

To the south of Perumal temple we have the Sannidhi of Lakshmi Narasimhar. The idol is very beautiful from the artistic point of view. Further south we have the Sannidhi of Visalakshi and Viswanathar facing east. Then there is the temple of Jothilingam. Beyond this we have the Sannidhi of Vedanayagi Ambigai. This also is facing east. The face full of compassion is really thrilling to look at. In the Nirudda Mandapa, we find the image of Saiva Saints and devotees, fixed on ten pillars.

To the South of this temple we have the temple of Arumugar facing east. Lord Muruga is seated on the peacock with Valli and Deivayanai on either side. To the south of this we have the temple of Surahareswarar. He is seen in dancing pose with three legs, three hands and three heads. Even chronic-incurable-fevers can be cured by praying to him. On Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays pepper rasam and Araikkerai Sundal (boiled green leaves) are offered to this god. The sannidhi of Sangameswarar is on

the Southern end of the temple. Outside the temple and on the south there are temples of Gayathrilinga and Sahasra linga facing east. On the west of them there is the temple of Amudalingesar. It is said that the Devas fearing the Asuras brought the nectar and hid it here. The nectar froze or solidified in the shape of a linga and hence the lingam here is called Amudalingeswarar. Amuda river springs from the foot of the linga and merges with Cauvery. Amudalinga is self risen (Swayambu) and is placed on the special platform or Avadayar. If any lady suffers from labour pains, she will find relief if her relatives come and turn the linga a little. There is a belief prevalent here that sterile people will give birth to children if they carry this linga and go round the Avudayar. Because of such traditional beliefs the temple is open to all through the day and night.

There are many references to this Kshetra in many a work. Saint Gnanasambandar has sung a hymn of eleven Stanzas. In the first stanza. he describes the prosperity of the place. In the 2, 3 and 10 stanzas he describes the affluence of the rivers. Stanzas 3, 4, & 9 describe the worship by Brahma and Vishnu while the seventh narrates the worship by Mavirathas. It is delightful to read of the glory of the place, Thirtha and diety in the hymns. Sekkizar in this periyapuranam says that saint Gnanasambandar went to kudakongu Kshetras only after worshipping at this place. Saint Arunagirinathar has sung about this place in his Thiruppughal. Vasudeva Mudaliar a scholar from Orathukuppai Chettipalayam has written a history of the place called Bawani Koodal puranam. It contains eighteen cantos and 901 hymns. It is said in that book that Kubera Paasara, Vakrasura, Tharuma Sanman, Viswamithra, Thandu vardana, Maruttan and Bingalai got salvation by worshipping at this place. Kovai C. K. Narayanasami Mudaliar has written a thesis or tratise entitled Bhavani Thiruthala varalaru or the history of sacred Bhavani.

There are not many inscriptions here as found in other temples. It is revealed from the inscriptions that rulers Immudikatti Mudaliyar & Katti Mudaliyar and General Devarayan had renovated the mandapams. On one of the pillars of the temple there are the figures of Immidikatti Mudaliyar and his wife. On another pillar there is the figure of Katti Mudaliyar in the posture of handing over a bag of money to a recluse for the purpose of renovation. There is a figure of a girl on one of the pillars in Amman temple. If water is poured on its head it looks like smiling. It is called as "Smiling Statue figure."

In the beginning of nineteenth century, William Garrow the then Collector started building a mansion near the northern gate. One day he dreamt of a girl coming and asking him to leave the house at once and

immediately he obeyed the order. Next moment the rafter of the ceiling of his bed room broke bringing down the roof. Believing that Goddess Vedanayagi had saved him from the danger, he became devoted to her. As a token of his love and devotion he offered an ivory cot to be kept in the Palliyarai (the holy bedroom). On the cot we have the following statement engraved both in English and Tamil "Presented to the Goddess Sangameswarar Vedanayagi at Baavanikoodal by Lord William Garrow 1804". The building wherein he lived is now the travellers Bungalow of the Municipality. Moreover to facilitate his daily worship of the Goddess there are holes made in the compound wall exactly opposite to the Amman Sannidhi. This can be seen even today. What a devotion the Englishman had! The steps and walls on the bank of the river have been renovated at a cost of Rs. 47,000. There are four rest houses for the pilgrims. They have been built near the north gate tower at a cost of Rs. 30,000. The Kumbabisheham of this temple was performed only recently.

SALEM DISTRICT

34. TIRUCHENKODU

This *Sthala* is situated between Salem and Erode is Salem District and the place is at a distance of 6 miles from Sankaridrug Station on the Salem-Coimbatore Section. This is one of the seven *Sthalas* belonging to *Konku Nadu* (Salem and Coimbatore Districts) consecrated by the songs of saints. The *Silappadikaram* has a reference to the place and Tirugnana Sambandar pays homage to the *Sthala* in his *Pathikas*. The various names attributed to the sthala in literary works and *Puranas* are as follows: "*Deiva Tirumalai*", *Naga Giri, Naga Achalam, Naga Malai, Arava Giri, Uraga Verpu, Katchevi Kunram, Pani Malai, Tandi Giri, Naga Butharam, Biyaka Butharam* etc. The term 'Chenkodu' means the "*Red Hill*". It is also called *Kodi Mata Chen Kunroor* which means "The place with the red Hill and towers adorned with creepers".

The hill at Tiruchenkode is 2000 feet high. The peak resembles a Siva Linga and the hill looks like a huge hooded serpent lying still. There are about 1200 steps cut out on the rock to go up the hill: There are many *Mantaps* on two sides of the flight of steps; They are *Adi Saivar Mantap, Tirumudiyar Mantap,* (also called Kalatti Swamiyar Mantap) *Tayili Mantap, Chinna Mudaliar Mantap, Singa Thoon Mantap, Arupadam Padi Mantap, Chetti-gowndan Mantap, Devar Adiyar Mantap, Ilaipparu Mantap* and *Gopura Vasal*

Mantap. We also see a big serpent with five heads, 60 feet long, carved on a big rock on the way. There is also a *Siva Linga* with *Avudaiyar* carved on the broad hood of the serpent. The steps near the *Arupadam Padi Mantap* are named *Satya Padikal*. (The steps of Truth) and parties involved in monetary and other transactions decide the issue by taking vows standing on these steps; hence the name.

On the top of the hill is the Rajagopura or main tower with five floors. After entering the *Gopura*, we have to descend some twenty steps to see the temple of *Tiruchenkodu Velar* and the *Nritta Mantap*. Lord Vela is seen in the figure of a Boy (Ila Muruka). Arunagirinathar sings of the Lord thus:

ceelaar vayar polir ceṅkooṭaṉaic ceṉru kaṇtutola
naalaayirankaṇ pataittilaṉee anta naaṉ mukaṉee

(Aruṇagiri)

The Saint here longs for a thousand eyes to enjoy the beauty of Muruka.

Beside the Sannadhi of Lord Vela, we find the temple of Artha-Nareeswara. The Deity looks white in colour; the figure is not of stone, nor is it a combination of copper, brass and zinc. The *Siddhas* noted for their *Yogic* powers are said to have made the figure. At the feet of the Lord is found a perennial flow of water. In a casket nearby is the Linga of Emerald. On the stone wall of the mantap beside the Sannadhi of Artha-Nareeswara, we find a beautiful design formed of nine holes and on three days every year the rays of the sun creep through the holes and fall at the feet of the Lord. The *Surya Pooja* festival is conducted on those three days with great splendour.

The *Nritta Mantap* in front of the Sannadhi is also called *Saba Mantap*. This is full of beautiful sculptures. There are four *Stone-Chains* hanging as naturally as iron chains. It is said that one *Pichaiyanna Asari* was the sculptor who made them. South of the *Nritta Mantap* is situated the *Tandava Badrai Vilasa Mantap*. The figures of Lord Nataraja in *Tandava* posture and Goddess Kali in a dancing posture, are indeed remarkable pieces of achievement to be found in this *Mantap*.

There are also certain other temples on the hill like those of Visalakshi Viswanathar, Adi Kesava Perumal, Nageswarar, etc. The *Pandeesar Koil* is situated on the rock at the peak of the hill. Moreover

there are many *Tirthas* on the hill viz., *Ganapathi Tirtha, Pavanasa Tirtha, Siva Tirtha, Deva Tirtha, Sakthi Tirtha, Shanmuga Tirtha, Surya Pushkarani* and *Chandra Pushkarani*. The *Sthala Vritcha* is the *Iluppai* tree.

The festivals of the *Sthala* take place only in the Kailasanathar temple at the foot of the hill. In the month of Vaikasi, the Car-festival for Lord Arthanareeswara is conducted.

The *Sthala Purana* associates the place with sage Bringhi. The Sage would never worship any Deity other than Lord Siva. In the guise of a bee or beetle he once worshipped only One Half of Arthanareeswara the Iswara part of the Deity and Goddess Parvathi was offended and his muscles began shrinking as a result. The Lord was moved by his unflinching devotion and blessed him with a third leg and the Sage began worshipping Arthanareeswara and gained the blessings of both the Lord and the Goddess.

Once Sivaprakasa, a great devotee of the Lord came to Tiruchenkode from Tiruvavaduturai. He is said to have performed many miracles here. He is said to have made a stone-bull move from its place to take ground-nuts, by singing a song.

There was a great poet Gunaseelar by name who was an ardent *Baktha* of *Lord Muruka* of Tiruchenkode. Another poet belonging to *Pandya Nadu* came to this place in order to challenge Gunaseelar to a contest in poetic skill. He began addressing the serpent shaped Hill and sang the first two lines but he could not complete the verse; his tongue was stock-still; he was feeling giddy. Lord Muruka appeared as a boy tending cattle and completed the verse with two more lines. The poet from *Pandyanadu* asked the Boy who he was; the Lord replied tha the was the *Last* disciple of Gunaseelar! The proud poet was nonplussed and left immediately for his own place, wondering how great should be the master if his disciple, last in rank, was so intelligent.

When Tirugnana Sambandar stayed here with his disciples for worshipping the Lord, all the people were affected by a highly infectious type of fever, the worst of its kind. The disciples also suffered from it intensely. It was then that the Saint sang the following *Tiruneelakanta Patika* and relieved all of their sufferings and the fever too disappeared from Tiruchenkode.

kaiviṉai ceytu empiraaṉ kalal poorrutum naamaṭiyoom
ceyviṉai venṭemai tiiṇṭap peraa tiruniilakaṇṭam

(Campantar-1)

There are quite a few religious and literary works dedicated solely to this *Sthala*: They are: "*The Sthala Purana*, the *Mahatmiya* of the sthala, Thiruppani maalai, Arthanareeswara maalai, Abidega Maalai, Shunmugar Sathagam etc.

There are many inscriptions in the temples on the hill and the Kailasanathar temple at the foot of it. They belong to the times of Jata-, varman Sundara Pandya, Parakesari Varma Chola, Rajakesari Varma Chola, Rajakesari Varma, Parantaka I, Rajendra Chola I, Krishna Deva Raya, Veera Viswanatha, Tirmalai Nayak, Chokkanatha Nayak and many other chieftains. All of them refer to endowments of lands, villages and gifts of gold for various purposes like feeding brahmins, temple services etc. Some of them also refer to the building of towers and mantaps. There are also many copper plates refering to endowments of lands to the temple.

There are buses running to the place from Salem, Erode and Sankaridurg. A few choultries are good enough for staying.

APPENDIX I

Pachakrithiyas of God NATARAJA

(Five Actions)

1. Sriste — Creation or evolution from the Drum-the Udukkai
2. Stithi — Preservation or Continuation from the hand of hope-the abyahasta.
3. Samhasa — Destriction from fire (in hand)
4. Tirobhava — Veiling, Ellusion or Concealment from the foot held aloft.
5. Anugraha — Release - Salvation or bestowel of grace from the fourth hand pointing to the lifted foot where in seek refuge in the soul.

APPENDIX II

Tamil Months with Corresponding English Months

Tamil Month	*English Month*
Chitirai	April and May
Vaikasi	May and June
Ani	June and July
Adi	July and August
Avani	August and September
Purattasi	September and October
Aippasi	October and November
Kaithikai	November and December
Markazi	December and January
Thai	January and February
Masi	February and March
Punkuni	March and April

APPENDIX III

108 Sacred Places of Vishnu.

CHOLA NADU Tanjavoor, Trichy Dt. and Chidambaram Tq. of South Arcot.	40
MALAI NADU—Kerala.	13
PANDIA NADU Madurai, Ramanathapuram & Tirunevelly Dt. (including Kanyakumari)	18
NADU-NADU South Arcot Dt. Excluding Chidambaram	2
TONDAI NADU Chinglepattu & North Arcot Dts.	22
NORTH INDIA North of Tamil Nadu	12
Sri Vaikundam (Paramapatham)	1
	108

ஈரிருபதாம் சோழ மீரொன்பதாம் பாண்டி
ஓர்பதின்முன் றும்மலைநா டோரிரண்டாம்—சீர்நடுநா
டாறோ டிரெட் டுத்தொண்டை அவ்வடநா டாறிரண்டு
கூறு பரமபதம் திருநா டொன்றுக் கொள்

APPENDIX IV

274 Sacred Places of Siva

CHOLA NADU Tanjavoor, Trichy & Chidambaram Tq. of South Arcot	—	190
TONDAI NADU Chinglepattu & North Arcot Dts.	—	32
PANDI NADU Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelvelly Dts. (including Kanyakumari)	—	14
MALAI NADU Kerala	—	1
NADU NADU South Arcot Dt. Excluding Chidambaram Tq.	—	22
KONKU NADU Coimbatore and Salem Dts.	—	7
TULU NADU Adjoining Konku Nadu	—	1
VADA NADU (including Kailas) North of Tamil nadu	—	5
CEYLON	—	2
		274

சைவத் தலங்கள் 274

துங்கவட கயிலாய முதலா வைந்து
துளுவொன்று தொண்டை வடநாட்டெண்ணான்கு
தங்கு நடுநாட்டிருபத் திரண்டு பொன்னித்
தலநூற்றுத் தொண்ணூறு மலைநாடொன்று
கொங்கேழு சிங்களத்தி லிரண்டு வைகைக்
கொழி தமிழ்நா டீரேழு முதலாஞ் சுலச்
செங்கையார் தல மிருநூற் றெழுபானான்கிற்
றெக்கணபாற் கயிலாயம் திருக்குற்றாலம்

(குற்றாலத்தலபுராணம்—தேவர்கள் சிவத்
துரோகமடைந்த படலம், பாட்டு 53)

APPENDIX V

Six Sacred Places of Lord Muruga

1. Tirupparan Kunram (West of Madurai)
2. Tiru Sir Alaivaai (Senthil) (in Tirunelvelly)
3. Thiru Aavinankudi (Palani) (in Madurai Dts.)
4. Thiru Erakam (Swamimalai) (in Tanjavoor Dt.) or (in Kerala)
5. Kunrutoraadal (All mountains including Tirutani, Chingleput Dt.)
6. Palamuthirsolai (Madurai Dt. - North east of Madurai.)

APPENDIX VI

Saivaism

We will now begin the study of Modern Saivaism. Its form of ritualism and philosophy is determined in the South by the Agamas or Tantras, 28 in number, from Kamicka to Vatula called the Dakshina or Right-handed and the different temples in Southern India follow the rules prescribed in one Agama or another, though there are still some temples like the one at Chidambaram where the pure Vedic Rituals are followed. This Agama Philosophy has also been greatly developed and systematised in Tamil by a line of Teachers beginning with St. Tirumular, St. Meykandar, St. Arunandi Sivachariyar, St. Marai Jnana Sambandar and St. Umapali Sivachariyar. Both in the rituals and in the philosophy the same mantras, forms and words derived from the old Vedic Times are used, for instance the temple represents the old Yajna Sala symbolising the human body. The Siva Linga, (it is due to Swami Vivekananda to point out that this was no phallic Symbols and this view was reiterated by Dr. Ananda K. Kumaraswami in his paper read before the Historical Congress of Oriental Religions in which he shows that it is the least anthropomorphic of Symbols,) takes the place of Rudra Pasupati and its form is that of the Prenava and there is the Balipidha at the entrance to the temple with the Yupastambha and the pasu or animal offered in sacrifice in the form of the Bull. Every Brahmotsava still commences with a sacrifice, (the blood sacrifice is altogether given up in the South Indian Temples) and the Pasu, in effigy in cloth, is tied up to the Yupastambha and after the festival is taken down the position of the bull or pasu will be found to be on the other side (God Side) of the Balipidha and stambha and is not called pasu but Nandi (Blissful) God. Because according to phraseology of Saivaism, the Jiva or soul, once it had become freed, is no more called Jiva but Siva or Brahman, what had to be offered in sacrifice was not an animal but the Jiva; the soul called also the Ejaman of the Sacrifice, had to ofter his Jivtavam, his animal part of himself, his Individuality or Ahankara or Avidya or Ignorance and the Naivedyam in all temples is now interpreted as this pasutvam or pasubhodham as it is called. As soon as he enters the temple, he is asked to prostrate in front of the Yupastambha. This is his offer of his self as sacrifice, and self-sacrifice thus becomes the centre of Hindu and Saivaite Philosophy on which the whole process of Salvation depends. This is the Arpana or Sivarpana referred to in Verse 54, chap, 18 of Gita.

The Philosophy also retains the old language for its technical terms. Whereas the newer systems have such technical terms as Chit, Achhit, Isvara, Jagat, Jiva and Para, the Saiva-Siddhanta technical terms to denote these Padarthas or Categories are Pati (God), Pasu (soul) and Pasa (bondage).

Pasa is the rope with which the Pasu is tied to the Sacrificial stake and this is the word mostly used in the Upanishads also to describe Man's bondage or Mala " Pasam dahati Panditah " (Kaivalya Upanishad).

The Pati is accordingly described in the text - book as follows.

This Pati is Param, neither Rupa nor Arupa, Nirguna without mark, Nirmala, Eka, Eternal, chit of chit, Achala, Infinite, Ananda, the unappraachable, the goal, the least of the least, and the greatest of the great, Tat and Siva (Sivaprakasa-I). (Pages 294—297)

Saivism is an eclectic Philosophy and an Universal Religion

Saiva Siddhanta as representing the old Hinduism and with its chief scripture of the Svetasvatara Upanishad and the gita, claims to be an eclectic philosophy and an universal Religion; and the various points I have brought out above will show how it brings itself into agreement with every shade of opinion, Religion and Philosophy. It describes Philosophy according by such terms as Sara, Samarasa, Siddhanta meaning 'essence of all,' 'true end' the 'Truth'. And we invite the kind attention of every religionist assembled here to the definition of an Univessal Religion given by St. Arul Nandi several centuries ago.

"Religions, postulates and text books are various and conflicting one with another. It is asked which is the true religion, which the true postulate and which the true book? That is the True Religion and postulate and book, which not possesing the fault of calling this false and this true and not conflicting with them, comprises reasonably every thing within its fold." Hence all these are comprised in the Vedas and Agamas. And these are embedded in the Sacred Foot of Hara.

And we will close this paper with culling a few opinions of European students of Saiva Siddhanta.

The late Rev. *Dr. G. V. Pope* remarks. "It is the choicest product of the Dravidian (Indian) intellect." "The Saiva Siddhanta is the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically Valuable of all the religions of India."

Rev. *Mr. G. Good will* follows with the remark: "Those who have studied the system unanimously agree that this Eulogy is not a whit too enthusiastic or free worded. That the system is eclectic is at once apparent."

Rev. *W. F. Goudie* writes in the Christian College Magazine (xx. 9) as follows:

"There is no school of thought and no system of faith or worship that comes to us with anything like the claims of the Saiva Siddhanta."

"This system possesses the merits of a great antiquity. In the Religious world, the Saiva system is heir to all that is most ancient in south India, it is the Religion of the Tamil people by the side of which every other form is of comparitively foreign origin".

"In the largeness of its following, as well as in regard to the antiquity of some of its elements, the Saiva Siddhanta is beyond any other form, the religion of the Tamil people and ought to be studied by all Tamil Missionaries".

"We have, however left the greatest distinction of this system till last. As a system of religious thought, as an expression of faith and life, the Saiva Sidddhanta is by far the best that South India possesses. Indeed it would not be rash to include the whole of India and to maintain that judged by its Intrinsic merits, the Saiva Siddhanta represents the high water mark of Indian thought and Indian Life apart, of course, from the influences of Christian Evangel."

Its ethical Basis

Saivism is based on the Highest Morality. As a course in ethics usually precedes the study of Religion, the subject of ethics is not usually discussed in text-books on Religion. The greatest authority in Tamil is the sacred kural by St. Tiruvalluvar translated into many European languages and pronounced by Rev. Dr. G. U. Pope as a book unparalleled in any languege of the world. The Saivaism of the South holds to the ahimsa doctrines as its chief pillar.

(Pages 313—315)
Published in 1911

(both from (The Studies of Saivasithantha) by J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai—paper read before the Convention of Religion of Calcutta in 1909)

APPENDIX VII

Vaishnava Saints (12)

1. Poikai Alwar
2. Pey Alwar
3. Boothatthalwar
4. Periyalvar
5. Andal
6. Kulasekara Alwar
7. Tirumazisai Alwar
8. Tondaradippodi Alwar
9. Tiruppanalwar
10. Mathurakavi Alwar
11. Tirumangai Alwar
12. Nammalwar

Four Saiva Saints

1. Tirugnanasambandar } authors of Devaram
2. Tirunavakkarasar }
3. Sundarar }
4. Manickavachakar — author of Tiruvachakam

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